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SERMON I.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

PSALM xvi. 8.

"I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

IN a world of restlessness and change, nothing can be more worthy of attention than that which offers stability and quiet; and every thing among the things on earth which promises rest, gains attention. Though stirred by the active tendencies of his nature to continual exertion, man feels that the tempest is not his natural element; and even while he chases with headlong speed the glittering objects on which he has placed his affections, he is ever and anon ready to acknowledge, that it is

rest which his heart longs for—and that if he could secure *rest*, he should be happy. Some think that a release from the engagements of their worldly business is rest: others think that if they can bring their engagements into an easy and moderate compass, they will find rest: others, again, (having experienced much of the inconveniences of their present employments) suppose that rest can only be expected from a change of employments. They look for rest only when they have exchanged the toil and turmoil of their every-day pursuits, for the more agreeable pursuits that lie smiling in the distance of their prospects. It is this desire of rest that often prompts to present exertion. It is the hope that the efforts of youth and manhood may secure an old age of comfort and tranquillity, that arms many an one to do and to suffer, that would else sleep in inactivity. Men all sigh for rest and security—the world can give neither. "This is not our rest"—here we have no continuing city. Religion can give both. This is the testimony of the

inspired Psalmist: "I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." May the Holy Spirit bring us to feel the truth of these words in our own experience!

The text tells us what the Psalmist did, "I have set the Lord always before me;" and what he thought to be the benefit he derived from this, "because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." I would direct your attention to these two points, with a view to establish what seems to be the general sentiment conveyed by the passage, that it is a realising sense of the presence of God, which is the great source of comfort and safety.

I. "I have set the Lord always before me." God "is not far from every one of us." The heathen poet could sing, "we are all his offspring;" and the inspired Apostle declares, what our own minds readily acknowledge, that "in him we live, and move, and have our being." He who created, preserves us: every thing that the creatures do, they do with his support; and where he acts, he is. He is conse-

quently every where: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me." In one sense therefore "the Lord is always before us;" as creatures, we are not only in his sight, but are actually supported by him. However great our unbelief — however great our sins — all is done in the presence of God; all is naked and open to him with whom we have to do. It is not this constant and universal presence of God which the Psalmist alludes to in the words before us. *That* cannot be affected by the faith, or unbelief of man.

But though God is every where present, man in his natural state does not acknowledge his presence. He does not think of God; God is not in all his thoughts. He

acts without reference to God; and therefore, whatever may be his profession, his whole life is a practical denial of God. The creature engrosses his heart, and it engrosses his thoughts. What he does, is done with an exclusive reference to himself or his fellows; "he does not like to retain God in his knowledge." "He says unto God, Depart from me; for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." It is not often that he can persuade himself to think that God does not see him; but he does not allow the fact that God does see him to have the slightest influence upon his conduct. He is "without God," and is so far from "setting God always before him," that it is the very distinguishing characteristic of his condition to do all he can to free himself from the consciousness of his presence.

The determination to set God always before him, which had been formed by the Psalmist, was something peculiar to himself, and those who resembled him. The feeling which dictated it, was not one he possessed in common with the rest of the

world; it proved him a changed man — one who had lost the unbelief which belongs to our nature; and had received in its stead, that faith of the operation of God, which transforms the rebel into the faithful subject. Till grace has effectually touched the heart, God will not reign in the heart: when the heart has acknowledged the claims of its rightful master, his empire will be established there; and while it is in vigour, the believer will be able to say with David, "I have set the Lord always before me."

For he regards *himself as in the sight of God.* The Lord is the spectator of what he does. Wherever he is, the Lord is with him; whatever he does, the Lord sees him. He knows that there is not any creature which is not manifest in his sight. "Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men!" All he thinks, and says, and does, is perfectly known to "him who seeth in secret." By the eye of faith he realizes this, and thus sets the Lord always before him.

But he cannot regard God, in his revealed character, *without loving and reverencing Him*. God has made himself known to us, as at once almighty and all-merciful. His power is impressed in living characters upon creation. Every thing that exists, joins in celebrating the wondrous might of Him who called the universe out of nothing, and who still keeps the creatures in existence by the potent exercise of his will. "He alone doeth great wonders," "Power belongeth unto God," and his mercy endureth for ever. He is a God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. He is good, and ready to forgive. He is long-suffering, full of compassion, slow to anger; and has made so rich a provision for the wants of sinful man in the Gospel, that it affords an inexhaustible subject for our admiration and love. It is to set the Lord always before us, to engage in frequent contemplation on his infinite perfections.

If *we* think *habitually* of God, we acknowledge his right to our obedience, and

our dependence on his support—we *regard him as our Governor*. We cannot think of him but in this character. He has created us; we have been *made* to glorify him. We have, above all, been bought with a price—the atoning blood of the Saviour—and are therefore bound to glorify him. To acknowledge these obligations, to feel ourselves constrained to devote ourselves to his service, is to "set the Lord always before us," for it is to live to him.

II. But what does the Psalmist tell us is the benefit of this state of mind? "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." To "set the Lord always before us," is to bring him to our right hand, to support, and to assist us. God *is with* his servants in a sense much higher than he is said to *be with* others. He is with them to protect them, to sustain them, and to help them. He is with them to strengthen them in temptation, to defend them in danger, to deliver them in distress. His presence at their right hand is a pledge of every needful blessing.

"Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." If we are really the servants of God, God is engaged to protect us. He has repeatedly promised to watch over and to guard those who devote themselves to his service. The history of his dealings with his people in other times, recorded on the pages of inspiration, shews us how he observes his promise. Abraham obeys the call of God, and leaves the land of his fathers, to receive an inheritance in an unknown and distant country. He sojourned among powerful nations; he was exposed to hostile violence and wasting famine. The God, whose servant he had declared himself, was ever at hand to counsel and protect him. Success attended his enterprises, prosperity crowned his life; and great as were the dangers to which he was exposed, he never was moved. The life of David himself exemplifies, in a very remarkable degree, the constant protection which God extends to his people. Never was a man more tried by affliction. From his first entrance upon the business of life, he incurred the sus-

picion of the malignant Saul. Popular favour tried him; then persecution tried him; in mature years, the toils of government tried him; and after he had also given the enemies of the Lord occasion to blaspheme, he was tried by domestic afflictions, yet he was never moved; save on that melancholy occasion, when he departed from God, and when he was so far from setting the Lord before him, that he seems to have said with the fool in heart, "There is no God." The Lord was with him in all his trials. Trust in God strengthened him; hope of a future deliverance cheered him; and what God had promised, he performed.

As God never has failed his people, we may be quite sure that he never will leave them, or forsake them. With Him "at their right hand, they will never be moved." While they trust in Him, He will uphold them. While they look to Him as their reconciled Father in Christ, He will bless them; the world will not seduce them; their own evil natures will not triumph over them; Satan will not get the advan-

tage over them. The grace of Christ is sufficient for them, in all the situations in which they will be placed. Their Father in heaven "will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able to bear, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it." All who "set the Lord always before them, will have the Lord at their right hand, and will not be moved."

This is the general truth. The words assert the happy condition of those who make God their portion, and walk as in his presence. But they seem to assert more, and to mark *the connexion* which exists in the very nature of things between the particular habit which the Psalmist calls "setting the Lord always before us," and the consequence of this habit, which he tells us is, that "we shall not be moved." Now, it is quite easy to trace the operation of the principle which seems to be here alluded to, in the common feelings of men. Are we in difficulty? how much confidence do we derive from the presence of a powerful friend! If the

danger we apprehend, is one in which he is able to defend us, we are, of course, quite secure while he is at hand to protect us. Have we been laid under any great obligation by a dear and valued friend? It will be our natural desire to please him. If we have but a common sense of gratitude, it will be our constant endeavour to make him perceive that we estimate the services he has rendered us. When he is in our thoughts, our relation to him will necessarily have an important influence on our conduct. When he is actually with us, it will have a still greater influence. If our friend is a virtuous man, the affection we feel for him will necessarily form a very considerable check to sin, and a very strong inducement to virtue. We are ever willing to conceal an act of sinful conduct from those whom we respect for their excellence. Nothing can be more likely to make us cautious and regular, than the presence of a valued and pious friend. In proportion to the affection and gratitude we feel towards him, will be the reluctance we shall feel to hazard his good

opinion by an act which he would be likely to disapprove.

Now this is precisely the effect which must be produced upon us by a sense of the presence of God. If we set Him before us by an act of lively faith; if we make him the object of habitual contemplation; if we come to regard him as always present with us, it is quite clear that it must have a most important influence on our hearts and lives. If we believe God is our greatest Friend, the friend to whom we owe every thing, and that He is actually present, beholding our very thoughts,—why, we must have the very first principles of our nature taken to pieces, and be suddenly altered in what most belongs to us, unless we feel it restraining us from sin, and leading us to holiness.

If we set the Lord always before us, as he will be on our right hand, we shall not be moved. Faith brings before us the duties that lie upon the Christian. The same blessed record that makes us acquainted with what it is necessary for us to know of God, sets before us what he

requires of us. The same principle which receives what is told us of God, receives also what is made known to us with regard to the way in which we may please him. We cannot separate the idea of God from that of holiness as acceptable to him. To know God, is, therefore, to be acquainted with the will of God: his will is our sanctification; we know what he requires of us. While we have him before us, "we shall not be moved" from what he requires of us, but shall walk before him in righteousness and true holiness.

It is easy to trace the effects of the practice which the Psalmist's example recommends to us, to see that it is naturally calculated to diminish the force of temptations, and greatly to augment the strength of the motives which would move us to holiness. Have we felt its force? Have we yet learned to "set the Lord always before us," and consequently been brought to a pious and secure resting-place? There is no security against being "moved" to be derived from any other principle. Unless we are living as in the presence of

God, and doing what we do to the glory of God, we have no ground of safety. It is Christian motives alone that can lead to consistent holiness; it is a firm belief in the great truths which the Bible reveals to us, that can alone bring forth fruit meet for repentance. Have we received the Gospel? Have we felt our wretchedness as sinners, and sought salvation in the way in which God offers salvation, as the purchase of the atoning blood of the Saviour? We have then the only claim a sinner can have—the claim of want. If we come, we shall not be cast out; if we seek, we shall find; if we desire a new heart, we may expect to receive it. And no single principle can have a greater tendency to holiness than this of the Psalmist: "I will set the Lord always before me." May we make it our own by grace,—and then, because the Lord will be at our right hand, we shall not be moved from present safety, and from future bliss.

SERMON II.

CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY.

St. Mark xii. 41—44.

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

It has often been noticed as a remarkable peculiarity of our blessed Lord's teaching, that he often availed himself of passing occurrences to illustrate and enforce com-

prehensive and important truths. The Gospels, rich as they are in such instances, do not afford any one more beautiful than the one which I have now read. The touching incident which was honoured with the Saviour's notice, is, by a few words from His lips who spake as no one else who bore the nature of man ever spake, made to teach the whole philosophy of Christian liberality. Let the sages of this world tell of the prodigal generosity of nobles and monarchs, and of the disinterestedness of patriots and scholars; we will admire virtue wherever we may find it; we would have our hearts glow at the record of the doings and sufferings of the wise and brave;—but, if we want to learn what it is that renders liberality pleasing in the sight of God, we must come to this simple narrative of the New Testament, and hear the Saviour say, "This poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

The incident recorded by the Evangelist, on which our Lord's remark is founded, requires not illustration. Besides the annual sum of half a sheked, which every Jew paid into the treasury to defray the expenses of the temple services, and to meet the exigencies of the government, pious persons were in the habit of making voluntary contributions for the same objects. As an ardent love of their religion and country glowed in the Jewish mind, all classes appear to have vied with each other in this display of liberality. The rich gave of their abundance, the poor gave of their poverty. He who is recorded to have said, that it "is more blessed to give than to receive," witnessed with satisfaction their generous emulation, and gave it all the weight of his sanction by pointing with evident approbation to the noble exertions of the poor widow. We can none of us hear the story without admiration. From the voice of Truth we learn to disregard for once the appearances of things, and to judge righteous judgment. The profuse offerings of the rich lose their

value in our eyes, when we remember that they gave of their abundance; while this poor desolate woman, in giving her two mites, gave "all her living." They and their offerings have passed away,—they will have to give an account at the Great Day, of the motives with which they offered, and why they gave no more. The poor solitary being, whom all but *One* then probably despised, has been set up as a living example to teach us; the first have become last, while the last is first. Let us study her conduct, with a view to learn the *duty* and *measure* of Christian liberality.

The Old Testament abounds in lessons of liberality. The children of Israel were not only required to provide for the maintenance of the public worship of Jehovah, and the support of an order of men set apart for the performance of the services of religion; but were enjoined in various passages of the word of God to give according to their means, for the relief of the needy and for the promotion of God's honour. We inherit these inspired instruc-

tions; and besides them, we have in the sacred writings of the New Testament other exhortations of a still more urgent nature. From the beginning of the Gospel, liberality has been acknowledged as in a peculiar manner a Christian virtue. The Christian is not a citizen of this world: his home is in heaven. He is here a sojourner travelling to a better country. He is not to live here as if the earth were his place of rest. His portion here is suffering and self-denial. He may not enjoy this world's goods, even if he possesses them. He is to "make to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," by bestowing it on good works. He is to "do good, and to communicate, remembering that with such sacrifices God is well pleased." "As every man hath received the gift, even so he is to minister the same." "Every man according as he is purposed in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." And, accordingly, we find that the first believers could scarcely think that they ought to retain any private

property at all. "As many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet." (Acts iv. 34, 35.) They were so impressed with a sense of the reality of the things eternal, and with love to their Lord and his body the Church, that they eagerly gave up all for his service. The spirit that inspired them should be found in all Christians. Our Lord calls us to forsake all and follow him. If our hearts are not estranged from the love of worldly possessions, we are no more his disciples than the Apostles would have been, if they had refused at his bidding to leave their boats and nets; or than that young ruler was, who turned away sorrowful at the command to sell all that he had, and give to the poor. We may not actually be called to give up all we possess, any more than we are called to attend the person of the Saviour; but it is vain to think that we have any thing of the spirit which should distinguish his disciples, if we retain our property for merely selfish purposes; if

we are not always ready to devote ourselves in every way to promote his glory.

But the duty of Christian liberality is so plain, that it is scarcely necessary to attempt a formal proof of it. There are few who ever think of questioning or denying that we ought to give of our substance for such objects as require our co-operation; the question is, in what proportion men are called upon to perform the duty. A mean and churlish disposition is so universally regarded with contempt and aversion, that you will scarcely meet with any one wretched enough to avow that he does not consider himself bound to render his aid in proper cases. But then it must be according to his ability; who would be so unreasonable as to expect that he should give more than he can afford? He cannot deprive himself of necessaries and comforts; he must provide for those who have any reasonable expectations from him; when he has done this, he will calculate what he can do in good works; till *then*, he must leave them to be done by those who are

more wealthy, or must leave them undone.

I need not say that this is a very common strain of reasoning, that it is indeed the usual veil under which covetousness seeks to hide itself from the sight of God and man. It is, indeed, in most instances a very thin disguise; we are generally able to see the sordid passion plainly enough beneath it. But though others may not be deceived, many a person has contrived to deceive himself; and we shall be likely to derive advantage from giving our attention to the case of the poor widow, which is so directly calculated to show the futility of all pretences of this sort.

Our Lord evidently intended to point to her conduct as an example. "He called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." If, however, we assume this instance as our guide, in as-

certaining the measure of Christian liberality, we quickly arrive at one point: we see at once that there are none who *possess anything*, who are not called upon to give in good works.

It is necessary to pause for a moment on the qualifying words of this proposition. In the present state of society, owing to the unfortunate extent to which we commonly carry what is called *credit*, it is not always very easy for a man to know what belongs to him; the means which he has immediately at his disposal, may not be his own. Now, it should be distinctly understood, that the first duty is, to pay to all their due. Till we are sure that what we have is our own, we may not dispose of it in benevolence. But neither may we dispose of it in any other way than in liquidating our engagements to those to whom we are indebted. I say not this to stay the current of beneficence, much less to give any countenance to a pitiful quibble; but to meet a necessary exception, before I maintain the universality of the rule. It is every man's business to make a point

of ascertaining how far he has the means of meeting his engagements. As soon as he has ascertained that he has, (and he ought not for a moment to remain uncertain about it,) it is his duty and his privilege to give in good works.

The words of our Lord would lead us to think, that the poor widow had, in giving the two mites, given all her visible means of living. It was all that remained after the day's expenses: she was then entirely destitute: she had nothing more. She would return to her labours, and earn another day's pittance, to destine it in the same generous way. The God of the widow had hitherto supported her. He had been her protector, when her earthly protector had been taken away. She had not wanted, though she was poor. She was thankful to such a gracious God. She could trust Him, who had hitherto supported her. She showed her sincerity by her conduct, and threw what she had saved from her pittance into the treasury. Our Lord looked with approbation upon her conduct, and it was registered in heaven.

Such is the extent to which the feelings and principles of the world operate upon Christians, that it is to be feared that many who bear the name of Christ, would pass, on conduct resembling that of this widow, the sentence of unqualified disapprobation. They would denounce it as thoughtless prodigality, as a tempting of Providence, as a wanton throwing of herself into poverty. Instead of calling attention to it, as the Saviour did, as a noble instance of liberality, they would boldly maintain that it was her duty to make a provision for herself against a time of need; and that, having so little, she ought to save all she could for the supply of her own wants. It is a duty to provide for our future wants when we have the means of doing so; but we are not to do so at the expense of duty. If we can cut off any extravagance, if we can in our expenditure save by our frugality, we may most properly lay by us in store against future need; and we may expect the Divine blessing on our foresight. But to harden our consciences against the claims which are made upon

us by the poor and by the Church, is not economy, but sacrilege. And those who withhold what they ought to give to such objects, only introduce a canker into their treasures, which will at last eat into the largest gains. If there is any good to be done, and the opportunity is afforded us, it is our business to do it. If we have the means, we are not to calculate whether it is beyond what is expected from our station—whether it is what others would do in our place,—but to give liberally. Liberality is a luxury; but it is one which almost all may enjoy. The wealthy may enjoy, in the exercise, the greatest pleasure which they can derive from their silver and gold: the poor may give their mites; and if they are warmed by the love of God to give all their living, their contributions, insignificant as they are in the sight of men, will be deemed more than the richest offerings of their richer brethren, by the Saviour.

There are none then who have any thing, who are not called upon to give in good works. With the instruction brought be-

fore us in this history, it is clear that we can admit nothing to constitute a valid dispensation from the duty, but actual want. It matters not whether the person be rich or poor: if he has any thing, he ought to give something. If he has little, of course he can give but little: but if he has any thing, he will refuse to give at his peril. He is called to exercise the duty. He may, of course, refuse to perform it, as he may refuse to perform any other duty: but he has no *excuse* for not giving. Let that be thoroughly understood. The smallness of our means, if we have any means, is not a valid excuse for refusing to give in good works. It is an excuse for our not giving much; but it is not an excuse for our giving nothing. It is well for the poorest to exercise themselves in this duty: it is an expression of faith which is most profitable to the soul. Where there are no means, the duty *cannot* be exercised. But if we have any thing, we ought to render to God of what He has given us, and be willing, in this way, to show our sense of what we owe to the Saviour.

It would seem from the words of our Lord, as they are reported by the evangelist, that this noble act of the poor widow implied some positive self-denial. "She of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." Even what she gave had been saved by some exertion and suffering. This teaches us again that we are not to decline the exercise of liberality because we may not be able to do it without some privation. We have nothing to give; but is it not possible for us, by denying ourselves some personal gratification, to obtain the means of giving? While we are incurring any unnecessary expense for show or sensuality, we cannot even plead the excuse that we have nothing. It is in that case our own fault that we have nothing. If there are any here who fancy they may plead this excuse, let them, before they can acquiesce in it, ascertain whether they husband their resources, as a matter of conscience; whether they spend any thing in vain or idle pleasures; whether they exercise all their powers in honest industry. Perhaps, if they observed

a rigid self-denial, (which as Christian men on other grounds they are bound to do,) and were diligent in business, they might be able to share the privilege of giving.

All this, however, is plain enough, though in practice it is so much forgotten. The most embarrassing question is, how persons who have abundance are to act, to share in the praise of the poor widow. It is at once conceded that they are not called upon as a point of duty to reduce themselves by their liberality to actual poverty. It is manifest from the whole tenor of the New Testament, that Christians are not generally called upon to strip themselves of all their property by devoting it in acts of liberality. The widow gave "all her living," because if she had not given it, she would have given nothing. Those who are in circumstances of plenty, may give much, and yet retain much for the supply of their future wants.

The Christian is the Lord's; and all he has is the Lord's. If he is duly impressed with a sense of his obligations, he feels this, and is desirous of acting upon it: he

should look upon his property as given him in trust, for the performance of those duties which he has been called to. It was not given him to consume upon his lusts—to gratify his appetites, or apply for purposes of avarice or ambition; but to dispose of in such ways as the providence of God may show him to be most conducive to the Divine glory, and the benefit of mankind. He cannot lawfully enjoy it as his own; he may not apply it to selfish purposes; he has no right to hoard it, nor to seek greatly to increase it; he ought to give of it, to seek occasions of doing good with it; and whenever an object in which he may do good by imparting of his substance, is brought under his notice, he is to act with liberality; not seeking to ascertain how little he can give, but how much. It cannot be disputed that this is a fair statement of the duty which every one who possesses means, is called to with regard to his means. He has nothing to do with human fashions and customs; he is not to shape and proportion his bounty according to received

notions upon the subject; but to act in faith. God has dealt bountifully with him; He has redeemed him with his own blood, and received him into his Church. He has given him more than he needs for the supply of his actual wants; he has given him plenty. What is the Christian way of disposing of it? It is usual in the world to let it accumulate, that the possessor may rise in the scale of society, and make for himself and his family a name on the earth. That is scarcely the way to have a treasure in heaven. If that is our leading desire, we shall desire no treasure upon earth; but rather emulate the poor widow, who cast into the treasury all that she had, even all her living.

To imitate her, we must give, not according to what we can afford, but more than we can afford. It is not my duty to recommend any line of conduct which might fairly be described as enthusiastic or visionary; I am not disposed to do so. But we must be conscious that we do too little in good works. I have no hesitation in recommending you to give

more than you have been used to think that you could afford. If we would imitate the widow, whom our Lord proposes for our imitation, we must do something that implies self-denial, and faith in God's providential care of us. We must give it for His sake, who can and will make it up to us. Till we do this, we do nothing. However large may be our contributions, we cannot pretend to imitate her, till we have done enough to cost us something. If we become disciplined to a right view of Christian liberality, we shall not need to hear any laboured argument in favour of a particular object. Every thing that has a claim to our aid will receive it. When the heart is once properly under the influence of love to God, of gratitude for the blessings of redemption, we shall regard ourselves as too happy in having the opportunity of showing our love by our liberality. Whether it be the temporal support of the ministers of the sanctuary, or the raising of Churches, or the teaching of the young, or the propagation of the Gospel in the dark places of the earth, or

the supply of the wants of the needy, or the maintenance of the necessary accessaries of Divine worship, that may be brought before us,—all will be received cheerfully and gladly, and will be met with a zealous desire to devote our substance for God's honour. And this would only be a small approach to the conduct of the poor widow—whose mites—whose whole living, was thrown into the treasury for the use of the temple.

SERMON III.

LOVE OF THE WORLD.

1 JOHN ii. 15.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

IT is quite wonderful to what an extent we are in the habit of using words, of which we do not take the trouble to understand the meaning. There are comparatively few, who are at the pains to get a correct notion of the common things which are talked about in our most ordinary intercourse. As things are further removed from the common business of life, the notions which are entertained about them are still more vague and uncertain. The names, however, by which they are

distinguished, are constantly in our mouths or in our ears. We become so familiar with them, that we never think of inquiring whether we understand them. And if anything occurs to make us ask ourselves the question, we are often surprised to find the extent of our ignorance. It is quite needless to observe, that this is often the cause of great mischief and inconvenience. It is most injurious in matters in which we are the most interested. It is in nothing so dangerous as in what relates to morality and religion. It is of the very highest importance to us to have correct notions of the words which are employed in relation to the concerns of the soul. Yet we are here guilty of the same weakness. We allow ourselves to become familiar with the symbol, without caring to ascertain what it signifies. Many instances in which this is common to a very alarming degree, might be noticed. There is no instance in which it is more remarkable than in the case of the word which is thrice repeated in the text. In this, and other passages of Scripture, we

are cautioned against the *world*; in our baptism we have promised to renounce it: the Church teaches us to pray to be delivered from its influence. And yet it is to be feared that there are but few of us who have ever set ourselves seriously to inquire what that dangerous object is, of which the Apostle speaks when he says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." It can never be unreasonable to make it the subject of serious inquiry. May the Holy Spirit be with us to bless us, in the examination of the subject this morning!

To illustrate the words of the text, it will be necessary,

First, to show what is meant by the *world*.

Secondly, to explain the inspired injunction not to love the world; and,

Thirdly, to notice the truth by which the duty is enforced; viz. that we cannot at the same time love the world and God.

1. Though there may be some difficulty

in ascertaining what is meant by the term *the world* in some other passages of Scripture, it is not difficult to discover its meaning here. The word is elsewhere used to denote a certain portion of mankind—those who were not included in the commonwealth of Israel, nor in the Christian Church; and who, living without a knowledge of any direct revelation, were given up to the practice of vice and sensuality. It has here a wider meaning. It is applied to the whole visible creation. It is extended to everything which is not God himself—for it is put in opposition to God. The Christian is not only required to abstain from whatever is contrary to the Divine law; but he is even forbidden to "love the world." He may not attempt to divide his affections between the Creator and the creature. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

If the word is thus comprehensive, it might be thought superfluous to pursue an inquiry into the details of its meaning. Yet such an inquiry is more calculated to be profitable than any general assertion.

And we shall derive little benefit from the subject before us, unless we ascertain some particular objects, which we are warned against making the objects of our affections, when we are commanded thus emphatically not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world.

In the verse which follows the text, the Apostle says, that "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." This furnishes the key to what he meant, in forbidding love of the world. It explains that he intended to condemn all love of the pleasures, the possessions, and the honours of the present life, as a feeling which withdraws the heart from the proper object of its affections, to the service of an unworthy rival.

It appears, I say, from the text, as explained by this following verse, that we may not love the pleasures of the world. By "the lust of the flesh," it does not appear that the Apostle means such a gratification of the appetites as is universally acknowledged to be sinful. It is so

plain that such pleasures are unlawful for Christians, that he would scarcely have named them, in any enumeration of particulars about which, previous to the command, it would be uncertain whether or not they were forbidden by the Gospel. It would seem, therefore, that he here rather means such a gratification of the appetites as is not expressly denounced by the moral law, but as is generally regarded as a mere compliance with the natural instincts of our nature. Considered in itself, we can conceive this to be perfectly indifferent and void of offence. Our remaining in the present life, implies our supplying our bodily necessities; and it is quite certain, from the express testimony of God's word, that in gratifying our natural instincts, we may not only be acting without sin, but may be even setting forth his glory. Yet we may not deceive ourselves. The most innocent gratifications or employments may come within the scope of the text. We may easily feel towards them, what may make them sinful. It is easy to *exceed*, even in the most harmless

pleasures; and even when we are avoiding excess, we are not safe from the danger of transgression, for whatever they may be in themselves, they may be the subjects of sin, as forming part of the world.

2. "The lust of the eyes" forms the second article in the Apostle's enumeration. The present life is but "a vain show." It has really nothing substantial. All it has to afford, is so uncertain and transitory, that it can scarcely be regarded as a reality. What we possess in it, can scarcely be called our own; it only pleases the sight and the fancy. What it has of the fairest and most beautiful, may indeed be lawfully admired and looked upon, if our admiration leads us to the Creator. The comforts and delicacies of life may be so enjoyed, as to further the work of holiness in our souls. But all outward things are dangerous; and when they become the objects of sinful feeling, they only tend to lead us into ruin.

3. "The pride of life" completes the catalogue. Man in his present state cannot live in society, without being exposed

to feelings of pride and emulation. He is disposed to plume himself in his advantages—to value himself on the various points in which he is superior, either from personal merit or outward condition, to those around him. God has given us different parts and talents. Society requires gradations of rank, and differences of station, and an unequal distribution of wealth. Even where there is no disposition to glory in the possession of that in which we excel others, there is no little danger of entertaining feelings of arrogance, under a sense of the superiority which is conferred by the enjoyment of that which is not universal. There are few who do not enjoy something in a greater degree than others—whatever it is, it exposes them to the temptations which the world offers as "the pride of life."

Such is the world, in its scriptural meaning. It is all that surrounds us. We can never want the opportunity of being worldly. We can escape the danger only when we obey the inspired precept "not to

love the world, nor the things that are in the world."

Every thing tempts us to love it. Our nature is corrupt. We feel all the force of outward objects. It is only by Divine grace that our souls can now be enabled to look beyond what is visible, to the unseen realities. We have no difficulty in understanding and feeling the influence of sensible objects which come before us in every circumstance of life, which make up and measure our present existence: we can realise the great truths which God has been pleased to make to us, with respect to himself and a different state of being, only by faith. But the greatness of the temptation forms our probation. It is by despising the visible, and striving to attain the invisible, that we are prepared for the happiness which God has provided for them that love him.

We may not love the world, nor the things in the world. It is not enough to abstain from what is positively forbidden as unlawful: we are called to a higher conversation. We are, if we are Christians

indeed, citizens of a better country. We are here strangers and pilgrims; we may not allow our affections to fasten upon anything in the wilderness through which we are passing. If our hearts have been brought into harmony with the mind of God, we shall have little inclination to rest satisfied with what we can find on earth,—we shall habitually aspire after heaven.

We have seen how comprehensive is the Apostle's view of the world. What does he mean by loving it? He evidently means, looking for gratification to it—deriving our happiness from it. The Christian is forbidden to value any outward thing as good in itself; he is sinning whenever he is receiving enjoyment from the creature without thinking of the Creator. God should be in all his thoughts; whatever he does should be referred to Him. He is not sent into the world to gather flowers, nor to disport himself in any way after his own inclination, but to move onward; to deny himself, to take up the cross, and follow his suffering Lord. These are, doubtless, hard sayings: they have always been thought

so. Flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. But let us not venture to lower the exalted morality of the Gospel. If we attain not its perfection, let us mourn for our infirmity, and strive henceforth to observe it better.

The Apostle's command, which is explained abundantly by our blessed Lord's discourses, and other places of holy Scripture, does not mean that we are absolutely to avoid the enjoyments which are providentially laid in our path, or to renounce the relations in which we stand to others. The Lord is not the author of confusion; and the gifts of God may be enjoyed with thanksgiving: but every earthly enjoyment should be enjoyed in a self-denying spirit. We are to hold the outward gifts of God as gifts which we are content to part with cheerfully whenever He may be pleased to withdraw them. We may not make idols of his mercies; we may not regard them with any feeling which is incompatible with that complete devotion of the heart which we owe to Him.

Whenever cases arise in which we are

called upon to ask the question, we can never practically find any difficulty in determining whether we are guilty of "loving the world." We have only to be honest with ourselves, and our hearts will tell us whether we are "loving the things in the world" too well. It is well for us to ask the question often: if we are concerned about the condition of our souls, we cannot ask it too frequently.

It is evident that all who are engaged in the pursuit of pleasure, love the world. Though they may keep clear of flagrant sin, and only indulge themselves in what does not appear to be expressly forbidden in God's word, if they gratify their inclinations habitually and systematically, it is quite clear that they love the things in the world. If the world were indifferent to them, if they looked upon it with jealousy, they would practise themselves in self-denial; they would be afraid to gratify their wishes; they would labour to teach themselves to feel that earth is not their rest. The contrary habit shows that they have either much to learn with respect to

the danger of loving outward things, or that they are plainly guilty of loving the world.

The same may be said with regard to amusements. Those who seek relief from the serious engagements prescribed by duty, or habitually pursue what is suggested merely by inclination, can scarcely be acquitted of "loving the world." A taste for those meetings for the sake of mere amusement, which we call "society," is manifestly love of the world. The employments which form the chief attractions of such meetings with the gay and thoughtless, if not in themselves absolutely sinful, very often become so from the circumstances under which they are pursued, and always induce a dissipation of mind which is most destructive of Christian holiness. Who is there who would not shudder at the thought of being summoned from such amusements into eternity? At all events, they cannot be enjoyed without being loved —and the command is, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

The care of our own is so plain a duty, and an active attention to our lawful business is so clearly permitted to the Christian, that many seem to think that while they are honestly exercising their callings, they are in no danger of loving the world. Business is a toil to them; they say they pursue it only that they may provide for those whom God has given them, and to supply their own necessities. They would willingly be disengaged from it altogether, but they can in no other way discharge their duty. This is plausible; it is so far true, that it is able even to impose upon persons who are in the main honest in bringing it forward. For persons generally do not seriously examine it. If they did, they would see that even when worldly business is pursued, from such motives, it may serve to entangle us in the love of the world. It is the love of the world which, after all, is the original cause of their being involved so deeply in its concerns. If they were content with such moderate means and such moderate prospects, for themselves and those who are dependent upon them,

as Christian principles allow, they would never enter so deeply into its concerns It is generally "the pride of life," either ambition or vanity, which leads them to engagements which in themselves are toilsome: and they have their reward in their gains or their reputation. Whatever their pursuits may be, whether they are those of wealth, or honour, or literature, if they are conducted with a view to the gratification of any wish which refers in the first instance to the present, "they love the world." If that love engrosses their hearts, "the love of the Father is not in them."

III. And this leads us to the last point which the text brings before us: the fact by which the Apostle enforces the duty which he inculcates; namely, that we cannot at the same time love the world and God. Our Lord assures us, that we "cannot serve two masters—that we cannot serve God and mammon." St. James tells us, that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." And the text says, that "if any man love

the world, the love of the Father is not in him." We are sure, therefore, that it must be so. We are sure that it is so. The heart is not capable of two contradictory affections; and the love of the world and the love of God are strictly contradictory: in the nature of things they cannot co-exist. The heart which is disposed to love the one cannot love the other: there must always be a certain harmony between the heart and the object of its affection. It cannot love what it does not admire and value. The heart which loves God, must be filled with a sense of his perfections—it must realize his presence, and feel its relation to Him. It must admire his holiness, and desire to be made like Him. It will thirst for the knowledge of his will, and desire above all things to be made conformable to it. Intercourse with God by prayer, by the Sacraments, and all the appointed means of grace, will be its chief delight. And it will feel no satisfaction so great as the consciousness of being sincerely engaged in preparing for eternity. The heart which is occupied by the love of the world, on

the contrary, has such a taste for present pleasure, that it is uneasy except when it enjoys some outward good. It sees nothing but misery in self-renunciation and self-denial. The things of earth have so much value in its estimation, that they deserve to be desired and sought after. When it enjoys them, though it is still unsatisfied, it is not because it feels that they are incapable of affording it complete satisfaction, but because it would still enjoy them in greater abundance or to a greater degree. It is quite content to make the world its state of rest. The cares and desires with which it is filled, keep it in a state of constant distraction; for the objects on which it is fixed are in a state of continual change. The passions and anxieties by which it is agitated, leave it no leisure for the calm and serious employments which are required in the service of God. The thoughts are engrossed by the favourite object. As the world is loved, it strikes its roots deeper in the heart which loves it; and such is the vigour of its growth, that it leaves no space for any other vegetation.

This is not mere metaphor; it is a sober and serious fact. There is a constant tendency in a favourite pursuit to gain from time to time a greater ascendancy over us. We must all have observed this. Let us beware of it, and act under a persuasion of the meaning of the text, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

My brethren, how stands the case with us? It may be supposed, by our assembling here, and by our general conduct, that we are not in subjection to any sins of a grosser nature. We have denied our profession by no scandalous transgressions. We have not cast off the form of godliness. But have we escaped the more subtle temptations? Have we fulfilled our baptismal promise to renounce the world? I have endeavoured to show the wide extent of that temptation. It haunts us in every occupation of life. If we are not slaves to pleasure, if we form no extravagant desires of worldly splendour, in the more modest and humble occupations we may be tempted by love of the world. It pre-

vails with us, if we allow ourselves to love with our highest affections any thing but God. We cannot at the same time love God and the world. However we may sometimes deceive ourselves, however we may often act as if we thought it possible, we must be convinced if we look into the state of our heart, that this is so. If we love the world, or any thing in the world, however disposed we may be to recognize God's authority, and to serve Him, we cannot do it. When we engage in acts of devotion, for instance, the heart will wander from its professed business to thoughts of earth and temporal objects. When we profess to be acting from a sense of duty, worldly motives will spontaneously mix themselves with our principles; and this destroys the value of the service. The offerings of God must not be defiled nor mutilated. If we profess to offer, and withhold a part, we only expose ourselves to the lot of blasphemers. We cannot silence the voice of conscience,—we have not yet quenched the acting of Divine Grace. We

had meanly yielded to their fears. The pious prince had shown a sad distrust in the power of Jehovah, and had basely submitted to the unjust demands of his haughty foe. He had consented to acknowledge himself a tributary to the Assyrian. The sacred historian has recorded it to his shame, that "Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah, king of Judah, had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria." To such a depth of degradation may we be brought by unbelief! But the peace thus bought by sacrilege, was of brief continuance. In a short time we again find the ambassadors of the rapacious invader sent to Jerusalem, to require unconditional submission, insulting the king, and blaspheming Jehovah. It was in this season of impending danger, that Isaiah appears to have delivered the prophecy which we read in his twenty-ninth and three following

chapters. It is, indeed, generally supposed to have been revealed on the occasion of Sennacherib's first invasion. But from an examination of its tone and matter, compared with the circumstances of the history, I am disposed to think that it must belong to the period of his second appearance in Judah. On the first alarm, Hezekiah and his people appear to have trusted to the effects of negotiation and submission, and to have had no thought of resistance. Their sin was an excess of dejection and alarm, rather than an excess of confidence. But when Isaiah was sent to them with this prophecy, they were breathing a spirit of resistance, and were hoping, by the aid of the Egyptians, to repel the Assyrian conqueror. The prophet reproves them for arrogance, rather than for fear. This corresponds with what we know from the history to have been actually the case at the time of the second invasion. The ambassadors of Sennacherib forcibly describe the state of things at that juncture. "Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria,

What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Thou sayest, (but they are but vain words), I have counsel and strength for the war. Now, on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt." (2 Kings xviii. 19—21). I conclude, therefore, that this striking prophecy refers to this latter period. But with whichever we connect it, we cannot fail to derive instruction from its remarkable language. A terrible enemy is at hand—already, perhaps, spreading desolation. The king and people of Judah are preparing to battle for their liberty and homes. As the peculiar people of Jehovah, they might have been expected to look to heaven for deliverance. But in spite of the outward reformation which had been effected by the pious zeal of their monarch, on this trying occasion they exhibited a worldly spirit. They are characterized in the inspired language of the prophet, as "rebellious children, who took counsel, but not of the Lord; who covered with a covering, but not of his Spirit, that

they might add sin to sin; that walked to go down into Egypt, and had not asked at his mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt."

Very different was the advice which the prophet was sent to offer them in this emergency. He was commissioned to call them to the exercise of the faith which had been so remarkable in their fathers, and to invite them to rely entirely on the Lord. Human aid could not profit them. The alliance with Egypt would be of no avail. They must look to Jehovah alone for help and protection. "For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still." They had only one course to take. They must expect no help from Egypt, nor expect to achieve their own deliverance,—and leave it to God to make for them a way of safety. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

If the people of Judah disregarded this Divine communication, and still fondly trusted in human help, till human help was taken away, may we, my brethren, receive it in a more teachable spirit, and pray the Father of mercies that He will at the present time give us the grace of his Holy Spirit, to enable us to enter into the meaning of this striking passage of His word!

It is very evident that the words of the text, though originally referring directly to the circumstances which have been noticed, contain a precept of universal application. When regarded in themselves, we cannot help finding in them a principle which never ceases to be of force, and which is of no less importance to us, than it was to the Jews. Though there is not among us a Moses, saying with words of Divine authority, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord," (Exod. xiv. 13.) while the embattled host of Pharaoh presses behind, and before, the sea spreads a barrier that would seem impassable;—though an Isaiah is not in person address-

ing us in burning language, and saying, while Sennacherib is at hand, "Their strength is to sit still:"—the inspired words of those illustrious ministers of Jehovah form part of the book which is given for our learning, and, different as are our circumstances, we are bound to regard them as setting before us our duty, and furnishing us with the encouragements which we might need to induce us to perform it.

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." By a common instinct of our nature we look to our bodily and mental faculties for self-preservation and safety. If danger presents itself, we avail ourselves of every thing which promises to afford us help. In more tranquil circumstances, we are constantly engaged in search of happiness and enjoyment, and in the pursuit eagerly embrace whatever offers to supply our wants and to minister to our pleasure. This is the natural law of our being: it is the natural law of all beings. But man is a fallen being; and if he follows this instinct of his nature, he will only become continually more corrupt and sinful; for

his desires prompt him to sin: and unless he acts under a sense of his relations to God, and acknowledges the restraints which are laid upon his appetites by the divine law, they will lead him to certain ruin.

To be safe, we must always look beyond ourselves; we must seek a rule of heavenly origin, and we must look to heaven for strength to enable us to observe it. The first point of wisdom is to know our own ignorance and weakness. Humility is the foundation of the whole structure of holiness. Nothing is gained till we approach God in the spirit which expresses itself in the confession, "We have destroyed ourselves; in thee is our help."

Those who are living under a sense of their relations to God, have always been mainly distinguished by one peculiarity: they walk by *faith*, not by sight. Instead of holding intercourse only with what is visible, they feel most interested by the great realities which they see not. They see not God; they see not the Saviour; they see not the purer spirits which minister to the heirs of salvation; they see not heaven;

yet there are realities to them as cogent and as influential as if they were seen in all their brightness; they are very greatly more influential than the things which form the present visible world. For to a sense of their importance they give up the vain show, which passes for real and substantial with those who close their eyes against spiritual illumination.

Those who walk by faith, who live in a conviction that the course of this world, both within and without us, is ordered as the Scripture tells us it is, regard things in a very different way to the unthinking many. With the love of God in their hearts, and his word in their hands, even in this evil world they may see their way plainly. They have been made children of God: the Saviour has taken them in his arms, and admitted them to the washing of regeneration. The Holy Spirit has enabled them to hold on their way to the city which is to be their home. They have done nothing for themselves—everything has been done for them. The same must be the case always; they can never advance

or prosper by a different course; God must still do every thing for them.—"In quietness and in confidence shall be their strength."

It requires little observation to perceive that it must be so in outward things. History and experience speak the same language—"The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill." Though we acknowledge it as a principle, that we may rely with confidence on the uniformity of the great processes of nature, and though we venture to depend upon certain results as sure to follow from certain causes,—the business of life is so entangled, the relations in which we stand to one another are so complicated, we are affected by so many circumstances, over which we have no control, that all reflecting persons agree in regarding it as mere simplicity to reckon with certainty upon success in worldly undertakings. It is no doubt natural to expect that talents and industry will be rewarded with success, that

activity and enterprise will lead to fortune. But there is something more necessary for securing the happy result than the habits and faculties which make up the character of the actor. He must have a field to work in; he must labour in a favourable season; he must have to contend with no insurmountable obstacles. Unless these conditions are complied with, the most exquisite parts and the very best habits are in vain. Unless they have scope for their exercise, they will be excited in vain, and only expose their possessors to contempt and ridicule.

The world can find out thus much; and when it has attributed it all to chance, and talked about hazard and fortune, it is fain to regard the thing as sufficiently settled, and to throw the matter aside as curious indeed, but inexplicable. We have been taught to look somewhat higher, to see the finger of God in the marvellous web of human life. Whatever is done, we have learned to acknowledge Him as the doer of it. The sparrow does not fall to the ground without His providential interference; and

there is nothing, however insignificant, in which man is an agent, which is not arranged by his wisdom and power. In us, therefore, it is in violent contradiction to our principles to set ourselves to carve out our own fortunes. To be consistent, we must be content to leave the disposing of our condition to God: it is our duty to labour, and to eat our own bread in the situation in which He has placed us; and, indeed, to follow the course presented by Providence, but not to seek high things. Ambition, and a thirst for wealth, are not sanctioned by the Gospel; they are of the world.

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." This is the maxim of religion: how wonderfully we see it verified! What a depth of wisdom there is in it! Look out upon life, and see who it is that are, in the long run, most successful. Is it the men of enterprise and unbounded activity? Is it the stirring and excitable persons, those who are most conspicuous in the busy competition? No: it is for the most part the tranquil and retiring; those

who make no display, and have least reliance on their own powers. The busy and obtrusive are continually giving place on the stage of life to the modest and unassuming. The brilliant fortunes of some, who appear for a time most favoured, only serve to call attention to their fall. The success which sometimes crowns the exertion of men of exuberant activity, only serves to tempt them to some act of rashness that will bring about their ruin, or to a negligence which will hinder their further advancement. The surest gains and the most certain advancement usually attend those who are content to go on slowly and steadily, without grasping at what is beyond their reach, or wasting their energies in unnecessary exertion. It is thus the principle works even among worldly men: when it is sanctified by being recognised as a point of duty, its influence is no less remarkable. The godly, who cannot engage on fair terms in the rivalry of the world, who keep aloof from it, and avoid it, pursuing peace with men, and exercising faith in God, are provided for, and not un-

frequently even raised to prosperity. The world will despise them, and make a mock at them, if it condescends to notice them; but they are cherished and protected by their Father in heaven. A way is made for them when they see no opening for escape; they are strengthened when they have no earthly friend to uphold them; they are, as they advance, favoured with a more intimate consciousness of the Divine care. While others pity them, they are cheerful and happy, for in this "quietness and confidence" in God's providential care, "is their strength."

Still more apparent is the application of this sacred principle to what goes on in the Christian's soul. A work is to be accomplished there, greater than any thing which is effected upon brute matter. They that built the pyramids, achieved something infinitely less than the sanctification of a soul. In accomplishing this great work, no one can labour successfully, but in acting upon the principle conveyed in the text, "In quietness and in confidence is our strength." Excitement and self-

dependence can do nothing. The work which has been begun by Divine mercy, must be carried on by the agency of God. We are to take heed that we throw in the way no obstacles by our rashness or despondency. If under a feeling of the importance of the work we have to do, we set about doing it in any way of our own, we only invite disappointment, and peril the very object which we have in view. There will always be those who, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, do not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God." They are suffering from a fearful delusion. There is only "one name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." We can obtain salvation only in the name of Jesus. The Gospel makes known to us the way in which we may obtain an interest in it. We have been united to Him, and if we will hold fast our profession, and follow his steps, our faith in Him is counted as righteousness. By availing ourselves of the means of grace, we have intercourse

with Him; we are furnished with grace sufficient for us; we shall be prepared to dwell with Him for ever. But it is only in faith, and in a dutiful and patient waiting upon Him, that we can obtain a blessing. We cannot extort his favour by pursuing any ways of our own devising. Not all the will-worship which was ever contrived by human ingenuity, can bring us nearer to heaven. We may perhaps be saved in spite of such contrivances—we trust that multitudes *are* saved in spite of them; but it is a perilous thing to leave the fold and the care of the shepherd altogether, or to be feeding upon pastures which have not been set for us.

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." These words may guide us in every difficulty of the spiritual life. They lay down a principle which is sufficient for every emergency. They bid us give no place to excitement or alarm. Those who act upon them, can be no fanatics, nor ever give way to despair. We may not seek what God sees fit to deny. We are not to aspire after ecstasies, or

flights of feeling; we are not to be affrighted by difficulties or danger. If we are tempted, we have the promise, that we "shall not be tempted beyond what we are able." We must be cautious what means we adopt to place ourselves in a more favourable condition for contending with our spiritual enemies. We must take care that we take no unlawful step—that in our desire of attaining what is excellent, we keep clear of equivocal means. There is great hazard that we may do so, if we once lose sight of this precious "quietness and confidence;" this willingness to leave ourselves to God's disposal, this firm persuasion of His power and purpose to deliver us. This, indeed, is the very essence of faith. Every other feeling, every other course, is, if we examine it, the very spirit and conduct of unbelief. We have small evidence of our spiritual progress, till we find ourselves willing thus to rest and trust in God. It is a strange way of seeking spiritual proficiency, to disquiet ourselves, and bring ourselves into a state of ferment and agitation. There is

no real strength to be got in this way. We may not do evil that good may come; we may not distrust God's power and willingness to help us; we may not seek help from Egypt.

The text affords us light and guidance on all the subjects most interesting to us. Regarded thus, it is especially valuable in troubled and unsettled times. We are living amid circumstances of change. So rapid has been the progress of society, that like men travelling in speed, we seem to see the very objects we look upon in motion. Men are in astonishment, and seem to be all asking what is coming, and what they are to do. From every quarter we hear an alarm given. Many seem panic-stricken: others are filled with unreasonable hopes. All this is very dangerous. There is great risk of partaking of the prevailing spirit. And what ought Christians to do, who would act consistently with their profession? Why, just act upon the principle of the text, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." What have we to do with the

spirit of the times? Are we to be excited because the world is on tiptoe? Are we to lose our patience and steadfastness, because worldly speculators and worldly religionists are in an uproar. No; let them follow their own course—let us only not imitate them. Let whoever will, "stand up and gather themselves together," they can do nothing without being overruled; when they have done all, they can only "do what God's hand and his counsel determined before to be done." Truth is safe; the Church is founded upon a rock; nothing can harm it, but our attempting to defend it with carnal weapons. We have in this sense no enemies but ourselves. Let us guard against unbelief, and remember that our business is after all not to fight, but to suffer. It was thus the Gospel triumphed over its early foes. It has never triumphed in any other way. There is a deep meaning in our Lord's saying, "they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword." The Christian's weapons are the word of God, and prayer. And in the use even of *them*, we must take heed what

spirit we are of, that we use them not in a worldly or angry spirit. God will not condescend to accept our services in his cause, if we presume to secularize it. Sacrifice which is not appointed is an abomination. The purest may not offend with strange fire. But what we do in "quietness and confidence," we shall do acceptably. "Only believe." Let God do his own work. Let us not venture to step beyond ours. There is great reason to fear that we may unconsciously be doing this in these active times. We are apt to think we may do every thing by effort, and combination, and fair professions. Let us be on our guard against such expectations; and rather practise what has such an encouraging promise connected with it, "quietness and confidence." That is prescribed,—that is safe. May God give us a holy courage and disposition to practise ourselves in it! and we shall then certainly enjoy His blessing.

Thus, my brethren, the text teaches us. What I have feebly drawn from it, may serve to show what a well of refreshing

water springs from it. Let me invite you to drink of it—let me entreat you to draw for yourselves. You will not exhaust it. It will refresh and strengthen, when heat and thirst oppress you. You have enough to guide you in every difficulty in this precious sentence, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

SERMON V.

SELF-DENIAL.

St. Matthew xvi. 24.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Mankind have always set particular value upon those sayings of the wise and good, which have embodied in a few words some important general principle. The apophthegms of the heathen sages, and the proverbs of the wise king of Israel, are more generally interesting than any other remains of inspired or pagan wisdom. Men who are themselves little given to philosophize, and who themselves are not aware of the cause of their delight, are delighted to find in a single sentence the essence, so

to speak, of some precious truth. They readily adopt what they could never have reasoned out for themselves, and are pleased with possessing in a compendious form what they recognize as the highest wisdom. And if the maxim be one that inculcates worldly prudence, or have any immediate bearing on their present welfare, it is likely to sink into their hearts, as well as to adhere to their memory, and to have more or less effect on their outward conduct.

Now the words of the text carry the principle of moral concentration, which is so much valued, very much farther than we find it carried in ordinary maxims, and consequently possess much higher value. They only express some particular truth, or lay down a rule for some particular duty. Here we have, in a short sentence, the principles and the rule which are to regulate the whole life. It is a sentence of such importance, that it really deserves our most serious attention. We are professing to follow the Saviour; we should endeavour thoroughly to understand what He requires

—absolutely requires from his disciples. May the Holy Spirit enable us all to enter into the meaning of these solemn words, and give us grace to practise what they teach us!

Our Lord's address is very intimately connected with the circumstance which the Evangelist had just related. In the 21st verse of the chapter he had told us, that "Jesus began to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." This announcement was very little to the taste of those to whom it was made. His disciples were, like the rest of their countrymen, constantly expecting our Lord to set up a temporal dominion; and they regarded the favours which they had already received, as pledges of the honour and power which would be assigned them in the kingdom of the Messiah. Peter, the most favoured and ardent of their body, ventured to expostulate with his Master on the discouraging and gloomy nature of his discourse. He

" took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." We remember the severe reply which was returned to this presumptuous language. " He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Peter had, indeed, given expression to the natural feelings of the human heart. His remark was conceived in the true spirit of worldly policy. But those feelings must be overcome, that spirit must be put down, in the Christian. Our Lord took advantage of the occasion to inculcate a great lesson: " Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

The first disciples of Christ gradually learned the temper and principles which were required by their Master Called by our Lord from their ordinary occupations to a wandering life of fatigue and privation, they had shewn their faith by forsak-

ing all and following Him. They recognized in Him the predicted Messiah, they were content to learn of Him what they were to do. He honoured them by his society and friendship, and prepared them for the still higher honour of suffering for his name's sake. From the time He summoned them to attend upon his person, trials and dangers did but thicken round them. Their distinction over their brethren was but a distinction in suffering. The lesson was not an easy one to learn. But they were at length enabled to learn it. They learned to glory in tribulations, to find their pleasure in persecution, to "count not their lives dear unto them, that they might finish their course with joy." Their history is a practical comment on the words of the text, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

We may not think, my brethren, that these words applied to those only who enjoyed the privilege of personal intercourse with our Lord. Let us examine them as

carefully as we may, we shall find nothing in them that qualifies the extent of their application. The precept could not be expressed in terms more comprehensive. To be a Christian is to follow Christ, and He himself says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

We have here, therefore, a precept which is addressed to ourselves. It was professed for us, before we could make any profession for ourselves, that we should follow Christ. By coming here to worship Him, we solemnly renew that profession. We hear our Master's words now addressed to us, that unless we deny ourselves, and take up our cross, we cannot really follow Him.

Now what is the duty insisted upon in these words? What is it to deny ourselves, and take up our cross? The language is figurative, and it has been variously interpreted. It has sometimes been misapplied to support the excuses of fanaticism. It has sometimes been entirely explained away. Yet the words are expressive; the

figures are not only intelligible, but highly explanatory and picturesque. It is a reproach to human perverseness that all do not at once perceive and admit what is intended by denying ourselves, and taking up the cross. To deny ourselves, is evidently to resist our natural inclinations, and to sacrifice our feelings to a sense of duty. To take up our cross, is to be ready to undergo any suffering or inconvenience which may await us in the path of duty. The first disciples were called upon to leave their families and homes, and follow the steps of Him who had not where to lay his head; they were required to fear not them which killed the body, but to devote themselves to certain persecution. If we are in some respects in different circumstances, our calling is nevertheless so far similar, as to make it necessary for us fully to enter into the spirit of the words of the text.

The Christian life is from first to last but an exercise of self-denial. Faith itself is self-denial. Our minds naturally seek to understand every thing, and reject in-

dignantly what they cannot master. Christianity brings before us a series of doctrines which are confessedly too high for our comprehension. It lays down views of the nature of God, of the condition of man, of the scheme of mediation, which are removed far above the reach of human reason; and it requires that we should not refuse to admit them on the ground of their difficulty, but that we should receive them as little children. Now after we have cultivated the intellect, and learned to prize it as our most excellent endowment, it is undoubtedly something very revolting to a sense of our dignity to acknowledge that we are bound to receive what we cannot comprehend, and to confess that, in the loftiest and worthiest subjects that can be submitted to us, we are not to reason, but simply to believe. It is undoubtedly true that this is the part suggested by true wisdom: that it is in point of fact the most reasonable thing in the world, to believe the word of Him who cannot lie. But still it is humiliating to confess the limited powers of that faculty

wherein we deem ourselves strongest; and it is without question to deny ourselves, to receive with unhesitating faith the sublime and incomprehensible truths of the Gospel.

The morality of the Gospel is not less opposed to our natural views, than its doctrines. An instinct of our nature leads us to resent and punish injuries, and to prefer our own comfort and enjoyments to every other object. Yet the Gospel teaches a course of conduct exactly the reverse of what is thus dictated by our inclinations. It requires us to "recompense to no man evil for evil." To "avenge not ourselves, but rather to give place unto wrath," and inculcates a "charity which is not easily provoked, which beareth all things, endureth all things." While it is so far from encouraging us to indulge our self-love, that it tells us, that those "that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please themselves;"—and that we are to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

All the virtues which are peculiar to

Christianity, directly involve the practice of self-denial. The humility which excludes every kind of self-satisfaction and boasting, the temperance which forbids the slightest deviation from the strict rule of moderation, the gentleness which no provocation can destroy,—are none of them practised but by making a firm stand against temptation, and by consistently opposing the current of our natural inclinations. Such is the extent of human corruption, such the purity of the Divine law, that even in Christian countries a large proportion of the population remains uninfluenced by Gospel principles, and must be regarded as forming part of that evil world which is subject to the power of evil. It is, therefore, always part of our probation to be exposed to the world's allurements and assaults. It is a principle of our constitution to feel the attraction of a multitude; to experience most pleasure in doing as others do, in imitating the examples which are set before us. When the natural inclination of our hearts is added to this feeling, it forms a force which

it is not easy to withstand, which certainly cannot be overcome without a painful effort. But our calling requires of us this effort. The principles which the Gospel inculcates, and the conduct which it prescribes, are directly opposed to the maxims and practices of the world. We must be prepared to deny ourselves, if we would follow the Saviour.

But the words mean more than this. They not only warn us to expect to be called upon for self-denial—they evidently suggest the necessity of our cultivating a habit of self-denial. That man is little likely to be in a spirit willingly to resign every enjoyment to duty, who eagerly seeks enjoyment, who enjoys with avidity all he can. To pamper the appetites, to indulge the inclinations, whenever and in whatever we can without positive sin, is a strange course for those to take who profess to be following the Saviour. Doubtless, "every creature of God is good," and we may in thankfulness partake innocently of our heavenly Father's bounty. The Gospel is a law of liberty, only we may not

use it as a cloak for what is evil. I am not going to teach a system of will-worship, or to invite you to the practice of a deluding self-righteousness. But I cannot see how it is possible to avoid collecting from such a passage as the text, illustrated as it is by other places of Scripture, that it is part of our calling to deny ourselves in much that we might enjoy, that we may learn to set the less value on outward good things, and be ready to give up all at the bidding of our Master. It was to discipline us in the acquiring of a self-denying temper, that the Church prescribed the abstinence which all her children were required to exercise during the present season. The penitential observances of Lent have gone into general disuse. The fact is one that calls for humiliation—it has brought its own punishment—we have lost an important means of treating the disorders of the soul. But, my brethren, let the recurrence of the season at all events lead us to self-examination and meditation. Let us learn at least spiritually to deny ourselves, if we have not a Christian courage sufficiently

strong humbly to bear our testimony to the authority of the Church, by conforming (in spite of the prevailing practice) to her requirements. Let us study to cultivate a spirit of self-mortification, to die to the world, and have our conversation in heaven.

But the precept of the text enjoins another and a higher duty. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." The disciple of Christ is called upon, not only to resign present indulgences, but to undergo positive suffering. The sign of the cross, which in baptism is set upon him, is not an emblem without a deep signification. He then takes the cross itself upon him—he must bear it through life; and, if it be the will of God, he must bear it with his Lord to Calvary. The Jews had been familiarised with crucifixion as a manner of inflicting capital punishment, by the practice of the victorious Romans, who executed in this way the malefactors whom they deemed it fitting to subject to the greatest torture and degra-

dation, such as fugitive slaves, robbers, and deserters. It must, however, always have appeared exceedingly repulsive to a people who had been accustomed to a humane legislation; and its association with their national humiliation, would but tend to add to the abhorrence with which it would be regarded. Part of the punishment of crucifixion consisted in the condemned person's bearing his cross to the place of execution. It is to this that our Lord alludes in the text, when he requires that he that would be his disciple, must "take up the cross." And the allusion clearly means, that he must be willing to submit to the most barbarous and humiliating punishment for his sake, if called to it in the way of duty.

Many of our Lord's first disciples literally endured what they were thus required to bear. With their Master, they witnessed a good confession in torture and in death. The cup of bitterness they drank, and drank cheerfully and willingly. The pages of Church history take up the wondrous tale of suffering heroism related in the

inspired narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, and shew us what feeble man can do, with Christ strengthening him. In the days of rebuke and blasphemy, when the Jews and Gentiles of the world were allowed for a season to try what they could towards violently staying the glorious course of the word of life, the precept to take up the cross was sufficiently intelligible. None might embrace the profession of the Gospel, who were not willing to die for the Gospel. The condition of the times is changed; we live among men who are called by the name of Christ; but are we to think that the precept has no application now? We are to deny ourselves; are we not to take up the cross too? Most assuredly we are. This part of the precept is equally applicable with the other. The life of the Christian will at all times be exposed to suffering. If we are not called to public confession and martyrdom, we must not want the martyr's spirit. It is not well for us to disquiet ourselves by supposing improbabilities. We need not ask ourselves whether at this moment we

are ready to bear witness to the faith in torture. But we should endeavour to ascertain whether we are enduring the sufferings which providentially form part of our lot; whether we patiently bear what we are actually called to suffer. Even now, a conscientious adherence to the precepts of the Gospel exposes men to suffering. The world hates those who renounce and avoid it. Let us be consistent, in walking as those who are dead to the world, in acting by the requirements of the word of God, and we shall be talked of, and censured, and ridiculed, and despised. This is inevitable. It is the result of the very nature of things. It is the Christian cross. Have we taken it up?—are we carrying it? Are we "going forth unto the Saviour without the camp, bearing his reproach;" or are we seeking to avoid the inconvenience and reproach which fall to the lot of the consistent Christian? Are we bearing, in short, a badge of ignominy, which, for ought we know, may be made the instrument of our worldly ruin? Can men of the world know us to be not of

their company, by the cross we bear? We must ask ourselves these questions. It is probable that many of us will stand convicted in our own consciences, if we apply them faithfully. We are too prone to shrink from every thing that implies hardship. Light as the cross now is, our evil hearts recoil from it. If that is the necessary condition, we hesitate to follow the Saviour.

And yet, how dare we hesitate? "To whom else shall we go? he has the words of eternal life." If we do not follow Him, what must be our condition in eternity! If we cannot resolve to deny ourselves, and take up our cross, can we calmly resolve to abide the consequences? There is none other name under heaven given among men by which we may be saved, than the name of Jesus! If we deny Him, He also will deny us. Oh, my brethren, let not slothfulness be our ruin in this matter. Let us not leave the most important of all concerns to take its own course. Let not death find us unprepared, and undecided; but may the grace of God

enable us to overcome every hindrance, to "deny ourselves, to take up our cross," and in faith and well-doing to follow our Divine Master!

SERMON VI.

THE TROUBLERS OF ISRAEL.

1 KINGS xviii. 17, 18.

"And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

THE character of Elijah, as it is portrayed in the sacred volume, is a magnificent picture of moral sublimity. Threatened, persecuted, banished, hated by his sovereign, receiving no sympathy from his countrymen, enjoying no human support,—nevertheless he consistently pursues his high vocation, and faithfully discharges his terrible mission of reproof and warning. Dif-

ficulties do but strengthen him, dangers do but confirm his lofty purpose. Like the beacon in the tempest, when its light shines brighter for the surrounding darkness, and the lashing waves which beat innocently against it, only prove that it is rooted in the rock: the sad circumstances in which he lived merely tend to display the dignity of his character, and to give us a better opportunity of contemplating the heroism of the man of God.

Elijah appears to have provoked the enmity of Ahab, by predicting the long famine with which God afflicted sinful Israel. The marriage of Ahab with Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Zidon, had led to the introduction of the Phœnician idolatry among the ten tribes. From the time of their secession from their brethren of Judah to the reign of Ahab, they had adhered to the worship of the calves of Dan and Bethel, which Jeroboam had substituted for the divinely-appointed service of the Temple at Jerusalem. Retaining, as they probably did during that period, the revealed truth which had been committed

to their nation, regarding Jehovah as their God, and worshipping him only under the hieroglyphical emblems which had been set up by Jeroboam to denote his presence, we can readily conceive the taunting sneer with which they ridiculed what they deemed the unnecessary precision of their countrymen of Judah, who clung to the ancient worship and the lawful priesthood: we can hear the loud complaints which they made of the illiberality of those who denounced their proceedings as schism and impiety. It is likely that many of them were not aware of the greatness of their sin. They allowed themselves to be misled by a designing person. His arguments were plausible; he appealed to their selfishness and pride; he persuaded them, that in what they did there was nothing but what had become necessary by the circumstances of the times. What could externals matter, if the substance was preserved? The history shows us. They were preparing themselves for an open apostasy; they were just paving the way for a public renunciation of the faith of their fathers; they were making

it an easy matter for their posterity to fall into the polytheism and licentiousness of the neighbouring nations. And, accordingly, when Ahab "reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria, and made a grove," his subjects followed his example with melancholy precipitation; and in that time there were "left but seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which had not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which had not kissed him."

It was when the nation had thus generally lapsed into idolatry, when the worship of Jehovah, even under that spurious form which had been devised by Jeroboam, was no longer the sole worship of the people, but foreign deities were admitted to share the honour due to the God of Israel, that Elijah was raised up to rebuke his sinful countrymen. The sacred historian brings him upon the scene with an impressive abruptness, which tells us nothing of his previous condition or fortunes. "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the

Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Those words were the signal of persecution. It would have been madness to have encountered the rage of the tyrant. He was commanded to flee. During the continuance of the famine, he was preserved by miracle. "And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." Elijah unhesitatingly obeyed. He met one of the king's officers, and desired him to announce his presence to his master. The text describes their meeting: "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

Though the speakers in this dialogue were both remarkable persons, though the circumstances which had occasioned their

meeting were still more extraordinary—their words scarcely sound strangely in our ears. We have almost an every-day conversation. And that need not surprise us. For when we have made allowance for what was peculiar in the history; when we have struck off what must be regarded as belonging to *that* dispensation, and reduced it all (so to speak) to a smaller scale, we seem at once among ourselves. We have left antiquity and the Israelites, and come down to our own age and people. Ahab seems to have been in no wise an uncommon person, except for the enormity of his wickedness. He does not appear to have had talents to distinguish him from the generality of mankind. This language to Elijah is just the ordinary language which evil men address to persons of integrity, whose virtues have stood in the way of the accomplishment of their crimes." "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" It is but the common-place accusation of the angry sinner—an accusation that deserves notice, only because it gave occasion to the noble reply of the prophet: "I have

not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

Now judge ye in this controversy. Who, think you, was fairly chargeable with being the troubler of Israel? Was it the monarch, who had by his example, and influence, and power, led his subjects into apostasy from God; or the prophet, who, looking with pity upon the misery of his deluded countrymen, had stood up to remind them of their sin, and to call them to reformation? Was it he who had disturbed what was most holy and venerable, and introduced disorder and innovation into the religion of his country, or he who, finding the moral condition of the land desolate and disorganized, sought to restore what was decent and ancient in opinion and practice? There can be but one answer. It is a case that affords nothing to detain us in its determination. Let us therefore leave the proud Ahab cowering under the noble retort of his illustrious subject, and proceed to a general examination of the subject of their

conversation. May the Holy Spirit be with us!

We have already remarked that the charge, which Ahab directed against Elijah, is one which is very commonly preferred among ourselves. The man who ventures to take his stand upon high principles, or to observe an unusual purity of conduct, is at once scornfully denounced as a troubler of Israel; while those who flippantly bring forward the accusation, seem to be as little aware as the Israelitish monarch, that the persons who really deserve to be described as troubling Israel, are those who "have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and followed" their own vanities.

We know, every one of us, that it is so. We know that it is the current feeling and language of society. Though we live among those who bear the Christian name, just as the Israelites were by inheritance the peculiar people of Jehovah, we have all of us perhaps been witnesses of scenes enacted in the very spirit, and almost in the very words, of the one before us. The world is ever at war with the spirit of

Christianity. It is always seeking to bring it down to a lower level. It loves not its humbling truths—its mysteries which baffle man's comprehension, its doctrines which shock his pride, its morality which offers violence to his lusts. It therefore endeavours to establish a different system, a system not derived from revelation, but from man's inclinations, or, as it is fondly called, his reason. This makes havoc of the Gospel. It takes down God's building, and raises a miserable fabric of man's designing in its stead. It denies or explains away the mysterious doctrines which faith only can receive. It gets rid of every thing that insinuates a suspicion of man's self-sufficiency, and lowers the lofty morality of the Bible to a convenient standard of calculation and expediency. Whenever this system, which is ever striving to establish itself, has obtained a general reception, as it sometimes may in a province or a neighbourhood, woe to the man who may set himself to encounter it! If, enlightened by the Spirit of God, instructed in the Scriptures, and nourished by the

doctrine of the Church, a bold and disinterested person, a minister of the sanctuary perhaps, or in his sphere a private Christian, express his dislike of this heartless and unchristian system, and endeavour to bring back those who may be within his influence to a sound and scriptural view of the Gospel, he is presently assailed by the cry, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" There is doubtless a plausibility in the charge; there is that in a simple exposition of the truth as it is in Jesus, which sadly discomposes the cold and lifeless system for which the world entertains so much approbation. It sets men thinking, and inquiring, and perhaps disputing; and those whose covert maxim it is, that the less men think about religion the better, have a grievous distaste for every thing which brings it into life and prominence. Those therefore who revive forgotten truths, must lay their account with being soon and perseveringly charged with being troublers of Israel.

The morality of Christianity is not less distasteful to the heart of man, than its doctrines. If it is disposed to have reason

for its instructor, it is not less disposed to have its carnal inclinations for its guides. Hence what is called the code of honour, and the morality of the world. Hence the maxims which regulate the intercourse of society, and the principles which are admitted in the common intercourse of mankind. A man may meditate, or even perpetrate, a foul murder, and only prove himself by his crime a man of honour. He may live a life of intemperance and profligacy, and yet lay claim to an unimpeachable character. His conduct may be frivolous and his professions insincere, and he may still be the very idol of his circle. He may be ever ready to take advantage of the simplicity of those with whom he is concerned in his dealings, and carry his love of gain to the very brink of positive dishonesty, and yet not be charged with a want of integrity. This makes the current morality of the mass of men. It has been reduced to a system, and from being so frequently brought before us, affects us, alas! too little. But let an enlightened conscience be brought to deal with any

particular part of it, let a Christian man express what he thinks of a transaction performed in the spirit of this wretched and abominable system, and he is forthwith denounced as a troubler of Israel. If he is dissatisfied with some miserable principle of expediency, or some false affectation of liberality, or some dangerous prejudice, and ventures to speak out sentiments dictated by the spirit of Christianity, his acquaintance, or his party, or the world, are up in arms against him. What right has an individual to set himself against the public? with what decency can one man, or a few men, dissent from the received notions of right and wrong? His opposition is mere love of singularity and contradiction; he wants to get notoriety; his sole object is to trouble Israel.

Now, my brethren, is this a fair charge? You have already decided in favour of Elijah; I claim your judgment in favour of those who, under similar circumstances, are still exposed to the same accusation. Those who assert scriptural principles that have fallen into neglect, and denounce the

evil practices which are sanctioned by the general approbation of the world, are accused of troubling Israel, of disturbing the public tranquillity, and introducing into society the elements of discord. *They* retort the charge upon their accusers; and allege, that the real disturbers are those who hold the notions and pursue the conduct, against which they regard it their duty to contend.

Peace doubtless is very precious, and may cheaply be bought at some sacrifices, yet still it may be bought too dear. It may not be bought at the price of truth, or duty. When we have a truth to maintain, or a duty to perform, we have nothing to do with the consequences it is ours to do what is right, and to leave the rest to Him who orders all. Supposing therefore we are aware that, in the discharge of duty, our conduct may be so unacceptable as to produce some ferment and disquiet, that is not to daunt us. We cannot help it. Our inquiry is, whether what we do is right? whether it is commanded by God? and if it *is*, our business

is to do it. In that case we cannot be the disturbers. If trouble comes, it is not fairly chargeable upon us. It is not the stream which does but obey in flowing onwards its natural destination, that causes the deluge; but those who have set the obstacle in its course. The defence of Elijah is unanswerable: "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

It is sin, which interrupts the public tranquillity. It is error, which disturbs the general peace. It is those who propagate false and ungodly principles, and sanction by their example or approbation unholy conduct, that trouble Israel. God is our legislator and our sovereign; we owe obedience to his laws, we are under the most binding obligation to observe his commandments. Obedience is not only our duty, but our happiness. We are so constituted, as not to be capable of real enjoyment, but in the practice of what is just and holy. The charms which sin is

allowed to wear, are but temptations, which are quite unable to afford any real delight. The sinner, therefore, not only violates his allegiance to his lawful sovereign, but introduces confusion into the very course of nature, and overturns the constitution of things. And what is done by sin in the abstract, is done in its measure by every particular sin. Even after man had been ruined by transgression, God condescended to continue to him the knowledge of himself, and to open to him the way of holiness and pardon. Without noticing what was done of old with this view in former dispensations, let us look at the position in which we are placed. We are all of us in infancy engrafted into the Church, and placed in the solemn relation of members of the mystical body of the Saviour. Vows are made in our name, by which we renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil; and engage to receive the faith, and keep the commandments; we accordingly become citizens of the spiritual Israel. God is our king, His will is our law, and it is an

act of treason to question his authority—a crime to disobey his commands. Let any one of us deny the faith, or pervert it—let any one pursue a course of systematic disobedience, and is it not troubling Israel? Is it not introducing innovation into the commonwealth? is it not attempting revolution, and bringing in, to the utmost, commotion and discord? Yes—it cannot be doubted, this is the character of sin. It is chargeable with all that may spring from it. When it has spread error and licentiousness far and wide, and at length a warning voice is heard inviting a corrupted generation to return to truth and holiness; if *then* the public attention is roused even to actual disturbance, and peace is banished before dispute and controversy; it is not the righteous monitor who troubles Israel, but those who have given occasion for his admonitions, and made it his duty to plead for righteousness and God. To do that which must provoke the opposition of the wise and good, is to cause trouble. If error is propagated, though it be done in honied words, and

invoking the while the honoured names of charity and liberality, it matters not: to spread error is to trouble Israel. If crimes be done, whether in wantonness, or upon calculation and with a regard to appearances, it matters not: to "forsake the commandments of the Lord, and follow Baalim," is to trouble Israel. It is mere hypocrisy in him who knows very well that he is himself the real disturber, to affect to regard the man of principle as the cause of disquiet. *His* object is to restore peace, and banish what cannot but cause disorder. And if the process be attended with some agitation, the responsibility does not rest with him, but upon those who have made it necessary.

But I have, I trust, said enough for the argument; and will now detain you only by a few words to press the inquiry whether we are imitating the part of the tyrant or the prophet? Do we hear the charge directed against us, of troubling Israel? Is our conduct such as to provoke the world to make our conduct a matter of reproach? Are we shining as lights before

it, furnishing by our principles and our lives such a contrast to what it loves, as to lead it to "revile us, and persecute us, and say all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ's sake?" If, while we are acting with Christian meekness and prudence, we meet in some degree with such treatment; if we are scorned as visionaries, and reproached as disturbers, it is but a testimony to our consistency—it is part of what we have been called to endure. And if we seek grace of Him who bore the contradiction of sinners against himself, we may cheerfully endure it. But let us not *deserve* the charge. Let us not resist the claims of the Gospel, and introduce disorder by our sins, or perpetuate it by our carelessness. May God give us grace to pursue the old paths of truth and holiness; to walk by faith in the Saviour, humbly seeking the preventing and supporting grace of the Holy Spirit, and doing the will of our Father in heaven; that we may never justly hear the charge of troubling Israel, from having forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and followed Baalim!

SERMON VII.

SAMSON.

JUDGES xvi. 28—30.

"And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

THE striking passage in which St. Paul enumerates the triumph of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews, has saved us from a mistake into which we might otherwise

very easily have fallen with respect to the ancient worthies of Israel. In reading the narrative of the remarkable transactions which are related in the book of Judges, we might glow with patriotism, or kindle in admiration, at the history of the heroic deeds of the extraordinary men, who so often arose to deliver their countrymen from foreign oppression: but while we were affected by the deepest interest, and felt all the influence of sublimity, we should have seen little in what we read, which would tend to the improvement of our moral being. The persons of whom we read, would strike us by their courage and daring; and we should, if we read as we should read every thing, see in the events in which they were raised up to be actors, memorable proofs of God's interference in the affairs of men. But inasmuch as their faults as well as their virtues are set before us by the historian, we should be likely to regard them, as to their spiritual condition, as ordinary men, moved to their great achievements by common motives, and

actuated by no feelings which gave them any superiority in virtue over their fellows.

In no instance would this be more likely to be the case, than in that of Samson. That remarkable man comes before us in the sacred history, more like a creature of poetry than as one who has actually performed his part in the real business of life. His life has all the interest and wildness of a romance, his character has all the great and amiable qualities which compose the hero; but it is not upon cursorily reading his history that we trace the deeper and more instructive elements which were at work within him. They are, however, well worth the pains of examining: we will therefore look into them by the light furnished us by the inspired Apostle. And may God Almighty grant, that we may enjoy his teaching and blessing in studying this remarkable portion of His word!

The events which preceded Samson's birth sufficiently indicated that he was to be a very extraordinary person. It was announced to his parents by an angel; and

they were instructed by the same heavenly messenger as to the manner of his education. "The child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." The promise made to the pious pair was accomplished: "The woman bore a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him." What we are told of Manoah and his wife, does not allow us to doubt that they brought up this child of promise in the fear of God. It would seem that he benefited by their care; for we are told respecting him, in his earliest years, that "the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol." Though it is not plain what is meant by those obscure words, we cannot doubt that they intimate that before he came before the world, he had already been favoured with divine communications.

In the austere discipline of the Nazarite, which forms so remarkable a feature in the Mosaic institutions, and which in

that preparatory dispensation shadowed forth the self-denial which was to form so prominent a requirement of the gospel, Samson grew up to manhood. He was already marked out as a person of a peculiar character. Every thing reminded him of his high calling. He was in the world as one not of the world. "He drank no wine or strong drink, he ate not any unclean thing; and no razor came on his head." In the course of life which was thus assigned to God's favourites, He brought strongly before the people of Israel, that the permitted indulgences which distinguished their law, were things of small account;—that there was a more excellent way than the gratification of the appetites; and that those who would aspire to the highest ranks of holiness, must abstain from what is most valued by the grovelling minds of worldly men. The saint and the hero must be nurtured in a different discipline. The stately ornaments of the mountain and the forest grew up amid the storms. No great attainments can be reached by those who

would live as the multitude. The body must be brought into subjection; the mind must be examined; the passions must be brought under control, or we are the very sport of the inferior part of our nature. If we would attain a high rank, and be superior to the common herd of men, we must begin by conquering ourselves. The sensual desires must be thwarted. Their loud importunities must be met by an imperative denial. No great physical strength can be attained without temperance and exercise—without open war with sloth and indolence. "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." Great moral power can be acquired only in the same way. Unless God gives us grace to deny ourselves, and to exercise ourselves in privations and hardships, we can never obtain that command over ourselves which is required by our calling.

In the providence of God, when Samson attained the age of manhood he formed an acquaintance with one of the daughters of the Philistines, with whom he desired

to be united in marriage. The Philistines, who at this time "had dominion over Israel," treated him with wanton insolence, and after he had contracted the marriage, showed their contempt for the young Israelite by giving his wife to another. This provoked him to acts of violence. His own wrongs roused him to avenge the oppression of his country. His first achievements displayed the intrepidity of his character, and his wonderful strength and valour. He gained the confidence of his countrymen. "And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years."

We have no record of the peaceful part of his life. This bold action had struck terror into his enemies, and henceforth they ventured to attack him only with guile. Unhappily, he afforded them the opportunity. It would seem that his great achievements had exercised a bad effect upon him. The leader of his people appears before us in the last stages of his history in a degraded character, exposing himself to unnecessary danger, as the

paramour of wretched women. He had so often defied the most appalling danger, that he learned to despise it. But at last he trifled with it too long. His unworthy conduct leads to his ruin. In a moment of weakness he disclosed the mysterious secret of his superhuman strength. Hitherto, in all his weaknesses, he had remained true to his vow. Low as he had fallen in sensuality, he had regarded himself as the minister of heaven, raised up for a high office, devoted from before his birth to peculiar duties. But sins are strangely connected. Let one be committed, and no one can venture to say what the last may be. He who had sunk so low as to be the companion of Delilah, was quite prepared to give up the last stronghold of his virtue. "It came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death: that he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength

will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." The perfidious woman did not fail to take advantage of the fatal secret, and betrayed him for a price to his enemies. The Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-house."

Such is the melancholy lot of Israel's hero. He, who had hitherto passed a life of glory, is now a blind captive, compelled to labour for his foes. He who, while he trusted in God, and observed the holy discipline in which he had been nurtured, in spite of themselves effected the deliverance of his countrymen, and treated his enemies with all the high-mindedness of conscious superiority, is now a degraded being, fallen from holiness and treated as a slave. What must have been his reflections in this miserable condition! How deep must have been his remorse—how bitter his sorrow! Cut off from intercourse with the world around him, by imprisonment and blindness, he could com-

mune only with himself. In the midst of all his wretchedness, his thoughts would recur to those happy times of peace and holiness, when he was the pride of Israel, and the terror of his country's foes; when he was the object of universal admiration; and, what was still more, was at peace with himself and heaven. He is now an outcast; the shame of his friends, and the scorn of his enemies. Yet, degraded as he is, he does not despair. We may hope that his deep affliction was profitable to him. He was still reserved for great things. The hero of Israel is not destined to perish obscurely in a dungeon. God's favour was still vouchsafed to him. We are told that "the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven." With his hair returned his strength. This probably was a favour granted to his repentance. We are now to see how it was employed.

Elated with their triumph over their formidable enemy, the Philistines held a festival in honour of their idol Dagon. To add to the enjoyment of the feast, Samson himself was introduced into the

temple, and was placed in the most conspicuous place, to be exhibited to the assembled concourse. This was the lowest point of his degradation. The champion of God's people had by his misconduct brought honour upon Dagon, and had given occasion to idolaters thus publicly to blaspheme. The insult to which he was exposed; the gross taunts of a people exhilarated with joy and wine, would, in any case, have stung him to madness: but if, as we cannot doubt, taught as we are by the Apostle's commentary upon his history, he was a believing man; the dishonour thus brought upon the cause of God must have moved him to holier emotions, and made him desire to be the instrument of vindicating the honour of Jehovah. He had never feared danger—he had often confronted death. His life had been devoted to his country and religion. It may now be offered up usefully and nobly. His mental and bodily vigour are concentrated upon one object, and he prays. "And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and

strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." There is much of personal feeling in this prayer. It certainly does not breathe the spirit which our blessed Lord has taught us. But we must not forget the relation in which the Israelites stood to the accursed nations of Canaan, whom they were divinely appointed to destroy. To war with the Philistines was Samson's commission. He was exhibiting a sinful weakness, only when he was connected with them in relations of friendship and peace. The self-devotion of this heroic moment, though mingled—as what in man is not mingled?—with human motives, exhibits his faith in the brightest light, and revives the remembrance of his former glory. Faith is illustrious in proportion to its difficulty. How can this fallen captive, who has sported with such an excellent gift, defiled himself by his connexions with the heathen, and brought dishonour upon Jehovah, expect again to be the honoured instrument of achieving a triumph over God's enemies? How can

he expect that the miraculous strength which was taken from him, because it was abused, should now be restored to him? In the heart of this fallen man the love of God had once glowed; in faith he had overcome by his single arm the multitudes of the Philistines; in the purity of the Nazarite, he had learned the beauty of holiness; grace had reigned in his heart; his soul had been nurtured by the history of his fathers, and the divine law; he had enjoyed all that then was known of God. Perhaps he had even enjoyed some especial communications of knowledge; at all events, it is evident that he knew the value of repentance, and understood the efficacy of faith. Degraded as he was, he could believe that God would hear his prayer, and grant him a signal favour. His faith thus regarded is instructive. Living as we do surrounded by temptations, bearing about us as we do a body of flesh, we are never safe. If we had only ourselves to trust to, we could not but fall. The best err continually. Too many, like Samson, commit scandalous

transgressions: but, like Samson, let them not despair. However great may be our sins, we may still find forgiveness with God, if we address ourselves to Him in repentance,—if we trust in his willingness to help us. To us are made known better promises than were known to the ancient Israelites. However low we may have fallen, however degraded we may have become, we may still turn to God in prayer. Though we have defiled the white robe put upon us at our baptism, by unbelief and sin, as he had lost the privileges he enjoyed as a Nazarite, we may still approach the throne of grace, and expect mercy.

That was Samson's happiness. We know not in what state he entered Dagon's temple; but, in all probability, a change had already taken place in his spiritual condition; and it is rational to think that he came there a penitent—at all events, he is a penitent now. And never did he stand forth more heroic than when he uttered that prayer. When, in the buoyancy of youth, he tore from his hands the bonds with which he had been manacled by his

coward countrymen, and rushed with a casual weapon on the multitudes of his enemies; when, in the pride of manhood, he showed his contempt for the petty expedients of treachery, by carrying off in triumph the gates of Gaza;—he had less of dignity than when he stood blind, and a prisoner, to be derided by the Philistine lords. For when a blind captive, the very ideal of impotence, trusts to the power of faith and the efficacy of prayer, to obtain the greatest of his victories, we feel the superiority of moral grandeur to the proudest display of merely physical force. That he prayed in faith is evident from his conduct, as well as the result: "And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars, upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left." Such was his conviction, that God would hear his prayer, that he immediately proceeded to act upon it. This is always the best proof we can give of our faith. "And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might;

and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

The conduct of Samson on this remarkable occasion may at first sight appear chargeable with rashness, and may even seem an unwarrantable liberty taken with his life. Perhaps, if we had no other evidence than what we collect from the history, we might hesitate to pronounce upon the state of mind in which he acted, and might even regard his conduct as a desperate act of revenge. But this was not the way in which St. Paul appears to have regarded it. If we form the more favourable opinion of this remarkable man, the circumstances of his death appear an answer to prayer. By that wonderful action he wiped out his shame, and concluded his life in a way worthy of his character. No great action can be achieved without hazard—often not without the last proof of self-devotion. Samson felt that his own death was inevitable. But his case cannot be called one of self-destruction.

We cannot be too cautious in placing ourselves in such circumstances as form a tempting of God's providence: with the light which we enjoy, we can scarcely conceive it possible for us to be placed in circumstances such as those in which Samson died. The instructed Christian will avoid scenes of strife and blood, and will be always more ready to suffer than to punish. But there is nothing which will deter him from duty. If he is called to make his confession, it is not the fear of death which will deter him. The annals of the faith present many a scene which we may well compare in heroism with the death of Samson. The history of Christian enterprise exhibits many an undertaking for the propagation of the truth and the good of souls, in which life was held as cheap as it was in the event which we are now considering. Though we hold life as a gift of God, and may not sport with it at our own pleasure, we are most assuredly called to risk it, or even to give it up, when by the sacrifice we may promote the glory of God, or purchase any obvious

benefit for our fellow men. Even human estimates of what is great and heroic, will generally be found to rest upon some deep moral principle. Disinterestedness is a noble quality, and there is nothing more dignified than self-devotion. Virtue herself joins in the admiration with which admiring nations regard the heroes who have not hesitated to die for their country.

Profitably indeed shall we reflect upon the mighty ruin which was drawn down by the wonderful man whose history we have been considering, if we can bring away from it something of the spirit of self-devotion by which he showed his earnestness in the cause for which he had lived, but to which he had been false in a moment of weakness. We may not seem to be in much danger of being called upon to exhibit the spirit of martyrdom. But our religion is of niggard growth, our faith deserves not the name, if we are not ready to sacrifice our lives for the cause of God. I would not invite you to embarrass yourselves by any self-examination with a view to imaginary circumstances.

But it is well for us to ascertain as carefully as we can, the amount of principle which we exhibit in our actual condition. How far then are we performing the duties of our calling? We are not called to such an office as Samson, but in our warfare with our spiritual enemies we need the purity of the Nazarite, and the giant's strength. Without faith we shall fall. However successful we may sometimes appear, some insinuating sin, some Dalilah, may gain an ascendancy over us, and give us bound and blinded to our foes. From the lap of pleasure we shall fall into a bondage worse than that of the Philistines. Sin will hold us fast, and hale us to its temples, to exhibit wild sport which only marks its captive's degradation. If divine grace ever awaken us, we must, like Samson, show ourselves men, and be ready to perish so that we destroy these accursed foes. Even if we have not like him fallen into scandalous sins, we must reproach ourselves with unbelief, with coldness of heart, with idolatry, with worldliness,—Dalilah has often had our hearts, and

shorn us of our strength. It is well we have to deal with a God of mercy. It is well that we have the record that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Oh, for faith in this gracious truth! Oh, for greater love to Him who has done such things for us! May He give us grace to live in faith and purity, and to triumph in our death, in the assurance of His mercy!

SERMON VIII.

COVETOUSNESS.

HEBREWS xiii. 5.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

PERSONS who habitually attend the house of God, are not very likely to be polluted with gross and scandalous sins. The admonitions of conscience which suggest the duty of public worship, are soon stifled by a course of licentiousness; and the sense of decency which brings others to the sanctuary, can have no force with those who do not shrink from open profligacy. Those of us who do not "forsake the assembling of ourselves together" in this

holy place, are in most danger from sins of a more subtle and secret kind. The enemy is not likely to assail us with open violence; but he is not the less formidable because he directs against us the mine and the ambush. It would be to fight with a shadow, to denounce from this place the grosser forms of intemperance; it is only a seasonable and necessary duty to expose the danger of covetousness and discontent.

Such is the deceitfulness of our hearts, such the extent of our depravity, that we are ever ready to recompense ourselves for giving up one sin, by indulging in another. If we have abandoned a more flagrant iniquity, we are not careful to ascertain whether the principle of transgression is effectually mortified, or whether it is still manifesting itself in any other way. We are too apt to acquiesce in the favourable appearance, and to conclude that, because we are not chargeable with what is so criminal in others, we are ourselves blameless; or that, because we have given up one acknowledged sin, it follows, as a matter of course, that we have gained so much in the pro-

gress of holiness. There is great danger of our deceiving ourselves by notions of this sort. Sin differs infinitely in the forms which it assumes. And it is a great mistake, often a fatal mistake, to suppose that we are free from its prevailing power, because we happen to be free from its influence under some particular form.

Though Christians are so expressly warned against the love of the world, there is reason to fear that among those who wear the form of godliness, there is no sin more common than those which are forbidden in the text; namely, covetousness and discontent. Let not this seem a hard saying. I would not be esteemed an accuser of the brethren. But the subject is important. Let us give it our serious attention. We shall be well rewarded, if we practically examine the matter brought before us by the Apostle's words. May the Holy Spirit bless them to our spiritual good!

The Gospel represents the present life as a pilgrimage, and teaches us to regard ourselves as strangers upon earth, travelling

to a better country. If our hearts are penetrated with the truths which it reveals, we cannot regard it any other way. This world is not our rest. It is the wilderness through which we are passing to the heavenly Canaan. We may not linger by the way; we may not fix our affections upon the unworthy and perishing trifles which lie in our path. Our condition during our journey is of very little importance. It is likely we shall travel the more easily, the less we carry. Present conveniences are only to be desired in as far as they promote the great object of life. If they tend to delay or encumber us, they are to be regarded as misfortunes. *This* is the point of view in which the present life is placed by the Gospel.

Now it is very painful to contrast this sketch with what is presented to us by experience. We look around us, and we see men of all ranks, and characters, and principles, contending in the race of life, and striving to overcome each other in their endeavours to gain a greater share of this world's gifts. Not only men of avow-

edly worldly principles, who do not profess to aim at any higher good are engaged in the competition; but in the bustling throng we see, busy as the rest, many who profess to be actuated by the holiest principles, and to entertain the blessed hope of everlasting life. The fact is not to be denied. At the present day there are few who would think it worth while to deny it. Many seem rather disposed to refer to it with satisfaction, and to point to the circumstance as showing that religion does not impair man's activity or vigour. But is it as it should be? Is it consistent with the Christian profession thus to enter into the world? Is it possible to reconcile it with such a scripture as the text? Let us endeavour to ascertain; for it is obviously of the utmost importance for us to know what is meant by the words, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have;" connected as they are with the blessed promise, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

It is a very painful thing to feel our-

selves called upon to apologise for the inspired precepts of the Bible before those who profess to believe the Bible. And yet, such is the worldliness that finds its way into the Church, that in our attempts to explain the word of God, we often find ourselves merely explaining it away. The Gospel is so pure and spiritual, that the worldly-minded cannot bear it. They complain of its requirements as "hard sayings," and turn away. It was always so; it always must be so. We cannot help it. Only let us not be ashamed of the cause of God. If men whose minds have resisted the transforming influence of Divine grace, and as such as have only partially imbibed the spirit of the Gospel, are offended—let no attempt be made to reconcile holy things to their prejudices, or to conciliate them by letting down the dignity of truth.

The Apostle says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have." Let us not dare to understand these words otherwise than in their literal meaning.

They plainly tell us that we are to be free from the love of money, and that we are to be satisfied with what God has given us. Money is only desirable as furnishing the means of gratifying the appetites, or as the food of a sordid passion. The Christian is called to a life of self-denial, and is required to distribute his substance to relieve the necessities of those who are in want. Whatever he has is really sufficient for him, for his lawful wants are satisfied with little; and of what he really needs, God's promise secures him a supply.

We live in a world of temptations, and we are in constant danger of imbibing the principles of the world. The great mass of men live as if they knew no life but that on earth. If they have abundant means, they think only of enjoying themselves in some kind of sensuality or another. If they have not abundance, they regard it as the great business of life to increase their fortunes. When these principles prevail all around us, there is very great danger that we should suffer from their influence. And if we examine our con-

duct and motives, we shall sometimes be surprised to find to what an extent we have adopted the principles of the world, and have forsaken the principles of the Gospel.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness." The Christian may not entertain the love of money; it is altogether contrary to his profession. He may exert himself to supply his wants by his labour, he may lawfully enjoy the possessions entrusted to him by Providence, but he may not set his heart on gain. It would seem to be forbidden by the whole tenor of the New Testament, that we set ourselves to the heaping up of riches. It is not only lawful, but a duty, to lay up out of our superfluity what may be required for the time of need. A provident regard for the future is absolutely necessary in all who would not disgrace the Gospel; and it is but proper and seemly that we should, if we have the opportunity of doing so in the fear of God, provide a decent aid for such as are dependent upon us. But it would seem to be pretty evident

that the Christian cannot safely labour to make a fortune, such as is desirable only for purposes of luxury, ostentation, or ambition. That is an employment only suitable for the children of this world. And to them it should be left.

But this is not the view which is usually taken of the matter. It is generally thought that the Christian is never unsuitably employed, when he is engaged in the pursuit of honest and honourable gain. Many who bear the fairest fame as persons of religious principles, are conspicuous for their activity in the various walks of business, and are foremost in the various ways of acquiring property. They scruple not to lay out the energy, which more thoughtless persons consume in idleness, or waste in the indulgence of the sensual passions, in sagacious schemes, and in persevering efforts, for the increase of their worldly fortunes. So that they pay all their due, and bestow some portion of their substance in benevolence, and observe the outward requirements of religion, they are conscious of no violation of the

Divine law in giving themselves to the active pursuit of money. They feel the fatigue of body and waste of spirits which their employments occasion: they are aware that they so engross their thoughts that they are not able to set apart sufficient time to the great business of self-cultivation, and meditation and devotion. But they are always able to excuse the course which they are pursuing. They do it all, forsooth, to obtain a future season of leisure, or to place themselves in a condition of doing more good—or to supply their families—or to secure themselves against want. Though there is much in all these pleas, where they are employed consistently, they are mere sophisms when they are employed as apologies for covetousness. We cannot but fear that they are often so employed. They certainly are, when preferred by those who are in a state of mind contrary to that which is described in the next words of the text, in which the Apostle states the feeling required in the Christian.

"And be content with such things as ye have." This describes a state of mind

exactly opposed to covetousness. It exhibits the feeling with which the believer ought to regard outward things, with which he must regard them in proportion as his soul comes under the full influence of Divine grace. All things on earth are ordered by his Father in heaven. He is placed in the condition which it is fit that he should occupy. Every thing concerning him is nicely adjusted to the circumstances of his case by Infinite Wisdom. It would be impossible to contrive any thing more suitable to his real wants than what is actually operating upon him. How is it possible for him not to be content? Will he presume to set his ignorance above God's wisdom? Will he venture to prescribe the course which shall be pursued towards him by Him who knows all things? No, we never dare to say this, nor ever to confess to ourselves that we think it. It would be too preposterous. But such is the weakness of those who would yet lay claim to the character of Christians, that they act in a way which convicts them of this very folly: we are all guilty of it when

we violate the precept of the Apostle, "Be content with such things as ye have."

There are some among us in poverty—labouring perhaps with incessant toil to gain a scanty subsistence — or, what is harder still to bear, disabled by bodily infirmities, or the conjuncture of what we call unfavourable circumstances, from labouring as they would wish to do. Many would extricate themselves from their difficulties, and relieve themselves from the trials with which they have to struggle. And yet they may not make it the object of their wishes. They must contentedly bear the lot which is assigned them. They must by faith realize God's providential care of them, even in their trials. They are called to "be content with such things as they have," and to submit with patience to the Divine will.

Divine grace can enable them to do so; though nothing else could. In other cases, even human motives might seem powerful enough to teach content. When our wants are supplied by God's bounty, and we

have enough to support in comfort those who are dependent on our care, it would seem to be unnecessary to enforce the duty of contentment. For in that case we have all we need for making our pilgrimage without suffering; and if we entertain the faith and hope of Christians, what would we have more? what excuse have we for discontent? The world may be agitated by cares and passions. Unbelieving and careless persons may be agitated by desires for worldly property, and influence, and distinction; but what have we to do with such things? It is true that excuses are not wanting. There is an instinct of our nature, which like all our other instincts in our fallen condition, prompts us to sin. We would always be advancing; we cannot be satisfied while we are stationary. The very fact that we enjoy so much, inspires us with the hope of enjoying more. Under the influence of this feeling, those who ought to be the most contented are constantly found aspiring to possess more. No sooner do they find themselves in possession of one comfort or enjoyment, than

they aspire to another. The point they have attained they merely regard as a step to something higher. This is particularly the case at present, when all classes of society are professedly engaged in attempts to improve their condition. One class is stepping upon the heels of another. Society is in such a state of change, that there seems to be a general licence to be dissatisfied. Not only do individuals, who are more successful than the generality of persons in their own rank, strive with unseemly eagerness to exalt themselves and their families, but throughout society whole classes are actually engaged in raising themselves upwards in the social scale. Well, and why should it not be so? Would you have the citizens of a free country confined by the unreasonable bonds that cramp the energies of man under oriental despotism? Would you have a system of castes prevail among us? Political questions are not to be discussed here. On worldly principles it would be hard to condemn the facts to which I allude; but we have nothing to do with them here. We are now to weigh

them by the balance of the sanctuary; and, as we must answer it at the judgment-seat of Christ, let us take heed how we yield to such temptations, lest we find some difficulty in reconciling our conduct with the precept of the Apostle, that we "be content with such things as we have."

But have we not now advanced far enough? Is it not enough to notice that those who enjoy competence may violate the Apostle's precept? Is it ever broken by those in affluence?—we must even proceed. It may well humble us to think that abundance does not necessarily bring content; but so it is. Those who are elevated by wealth, or power, or station, above their fellows, are by no means always "content with such things as they have;" on the contrary, it would almost seem that they are more exposed to envy and emulation than those in a lower fortune. As the number of competitors is decreased, and they are nearer to an acknowledged superiority, they become more eager in the race, and look upon rivals with more jealousy. Whatever

may be the extent of their possessions, however favourable may be their position, imperfection is stamped upon every thing human, and there is always something to serve as matter of discontent. The more the wants are indulged, the less of privation and suffering falls to our lot; the more fastidious we are likely to become, the more keenly we are alive to every circumstance of discomfort. Nor must we forget that in every lot, however splendid, there are really circumstances of inconvenience and trouble: there are annoyances which are inseparable from exalted fortune. In every condition, man is subject to the infirmities and sufferings which are common to our nature. The voice of complaint proceeds from the chambers of luxury. The most noble and illustrious need the aid of Christian principle and Divine grace to render them perfectly satisfied with all the circumstances of their condition. There are none who may not consider themselves as addressed by the precept, "Be content with such things as ye have."

And why should we not be? What rea-

sonable motive have we to wish to have a different lot? Whatever we have, God can render it sufficient for us. We who live under the New Testament are interested in the promises which were made to those who lived under the Old, in a sense higher and better than that in which they were originally understood. When Joshua was called to administer the office for which he had been designed, God assured him, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." (Josh. i. 5.) In every circumstance of life we are allowed to appropriate this blessed promise. We need desire no store of wealth; we should be satisfied with whatever we possess, "for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "There is a God that judgeth in the earth." The course of this world is ordered by Him who sitteth in the heavens. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge. He feedeth the birds of the air; and clothes the lilies of the field. And if He "so clothes the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe (and provide for)

us?" It is unbelief to doubt it. "If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto us." "He will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Whatever may be our circumstances, He will be with us, and His presence is a pledge of support and comfort. In our lowest need, He can supply us; from the most embarrassing difficulties He can extricate us; in the most severe trials he can sustain us. And He has promised to do all this. If the condition in which we may be is the effect of our faith, if we have come into the position in which we are in consequence of our unworldly spirit, if in any way we suffer for righteousness' sake, we are entitled to all the comfort of the promise; we shall enjoy the performance of it. God "will not leave us, nor forsake us." If we are in poverty, or in perplexities of any kind, we may be sure that it is because it is best for us. It is ill with us till we feel perfectly convinced that our heavenly Father leads us by the best way. He will provide us what is needful: if we desire

more, we do so at our peril: we desire what will most assuredly harm us. Thus the promise of the text is a sufficient motive not only to preserve us from covetousness and discontent, but from every other kind of sin.

A large proportion of those who are engaged in a course of sin, or who are neglecting duty, profess to act as they do in order that they may avoid the evils of poverty. They must live; they must make it their first object to procure a maintenance for themselves and their families. It cannot be otherwise than right to do what is necessary, to labour to supply themselves with what is required by their position in society, and the habits in which they have been wont to live. But this is grievous self-deception or hypocrisy. It is self-deception, in the case of those who are weak enough to be imposed upon by such sophisms, and who really allow themselves to think that there is any thing which can form an excuse for sin; it is hypocrisy, when these pretences are assumed by those who are conscious the while of covetous-

ness or discontent. Some are so occupied by business, as to be hindered from the discharge of the most obvious duties. They cannot regularly attend the house of God, nor assemble those who are dependent upon them for family worship, nor give sufficient time to private devotion and meditation, because, forsooth, they are engaged by business. Others give with a sparing hand in relief of the needy, and cut themselves off from the benefit of imparting of their substance in good works, because they have to provide for their families. What becomes of such pretences when they are brought to the light of God's word? How vain and hollow they are, when tried by the words of the text: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!"

My brethren, may these words be our guide and comfort! May we keep them in our memory as a talisman against the insidious encroachments of worldliness! And

while we walk through life with moderate wishes, and hearts satisfied with what God may allot to us, feel secure of His presence and blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

SERMON IX.

THE GOSPEL A CAUSE OF DIVISION.

ST. MATTHEW X. 34.

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

WHEN Isaiah prophetically announces the birth of the Messiah, and labours as it were to give an adequate title to the future king of Israel, he concludes his enumeration by a name which indicates the peaceable character of his reign. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." And he further tells us, that "of the increase of

his government and peace," or, as it might be rendered, of his peaceful government, "there shall be no end."

When the heavenly host that attended on the angel, who announced to the shepherds of Bethlehem the birth of the Saviour, raised their voices in the praises of God, their song was, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." And when in his last discourse to his mourning disciples, our blessed Lord affectionately prepared them for the approaching separation, one of the most effectual topics of consolation was afforded in the words, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

And most amply have these predictions and promises been verified and fulfilled. The one Mediator between God and man hath made reconciliation for sin by the sacrifice of himself, and therefore when "justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The

troubled conscience which throbs with a sense of guilt, and refuses to be comforted by the vanities of the world, or the vain devices to which it first takes itself for relief, feels the power of Him who stayed with a word the howling of the tempest. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, rules in the heart of the believer. "The Lord of *peace* himself," his gracious Saviour, "gives him *peace* always by all means." He, by whose mediation we are entitled to expect "joy and *peace* in believing," requires his disciples to "follow *peace* with all men," and to "be at peace among themselves." And there is no real believer, whatever his circumstances, whatever his trials, who will not find Him faithful who hath promised, who will not have to acknowledge, that loving as he does his own which are in the world, he loves them unto the end. For the words of the grateful Simeon speak the sentiment of the dying Christian, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in *peace*, according to thy word."

It is almost superfluous to say that the

words of the text have not any reference to the experience and conduct of the believer, and that our Lord's remark is merely intended to state the effect which the preaching and the profession of the Gospel would have upon an evil world.

Our blessed Lord seems to have been ever anxious to put his disciples on their guard against expecting any thing but trouble and persecution from the profession of Christianity. They had grown up, like the rest of their countrymen, in the hope of a Messiah who should establish a kingdom of great temporal splendour. When his mighty works, and the evident accomplishment of prophecy, convinced them that Jesus was the Christ, that hope glowed more brightly than ever; and in spite of much which from time to time occurred to discourage them, they retained to the last a confident expectation that their Master would at length burst from obscurity, and stand forth before his admiring countrymen as the acknowledged deliverer of Israel. The discourse in which we find the words of the text was addressed to the twelve

when they were sent forth to "preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." That they might effectually discharge their mission, by awakening the general attention to the character of their Master, they were empowered to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils." The authority with which they were thus invested was such as might strengthen their ambitious expectations. Our blessed Lord therefore, in the address with which he dismissed them, is in a remarkable degree copious and explicit on the treatment which they were to look for in executing their mission. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" They were always to expect opposition and persecution. But the fear of *that* ought not to deter them from duty. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him, which is able to destroy both soul

and body in hell." Notwithstanding all the world's malice, they were safe under the providential care of their Father in heaven. And then for the future—"Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." They might not think that the opposition which He now foretold would be confined to themselves, or that it would be but occasional. It would follow as a constant and regular effect of the Gospel. It was well for them, and it is well for us, to hear from the lips of the Lord himself, the words of warning—"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

It has ever been a favourite practice with those who reject the evidence of Christianity to point to the dissensions which have been produced by the Gospel, and inquire with exultation, how a system which has led to so much discord can possibly have derived its origin from a God of peace?

Our Lord's words exactly meet this objection, and turn the edge of the argument against the objection. It is the very design of Christianity to stir and agitate society. There is no peace to the wicked; but still there are ever those who will say, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. And it is the object of the Gospel to arouse men to a sense of their situation, and to set them looking out and inquiring for the means of safety. Taking every individual man, it bids him awake from a delusive security, banish from his mind all false peace, and war against his lusts. And addressing itself to society, it lays in it an element of striving activity, and removes away from it the chilly calm, which leaves on a living thing the image of death.

I say our Lord's words just meet the infidel's objections. They tell him that the Gospel was not designed to leave men at peace; but, on the contrary, to produce discord. And as spoken by Him who claimed for himself the wisdom of heaven, they farther tell him, that nothing can be worse for man than *that listless* carelessness,

or *that cold* indifference, which allows him to be at peace about the truth; and that when a man is really in earnest about his spiritual condition, he boldly takes a position on his principles, and resolutely contends for the hope that is in him. It shows a strange ignorance of human nature, not to see that a deep feeling and manly defence of the truth, is greatly (oh, how greatly!) superior, to the cold or affected impartiality, which regards all opinions as equally true or equally false.

The objection I have referred to, is of no weight in the mouth of the infidel. We often hear a similar objection from the lips of worldly and irreligious persons, against real and decided religion. When the love of God has once taken root in the heart, it will have an immediate effect on the life, and many a practice which the unconverted man thought allowable or indifferent, the converted will forsake, yea, and denounce as unlawful. And when by his conduct, or his language, he touches any of the practices in which those around him indulge, then he is at once assailed

with the reproach of being a troubler of Israel—of being one of those that have turned the world upside down; and we are told to collect from the effects of his strange conduct, proof, ample proof, of its being disagreeable to the God of peace. It is easy to refer the persons who make the objection in question, to the words of the text, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

We know how completely our Lord's warning has been shown to have been necessary. From its very first announcement, the Gospel has uniformly produced, just what our Lord foretold it would produce, division. While its Founder yet lived on earth, such was the opposition with which it was received by those in power, that to make profession of it, was to incur the inconvenience of being put out of the synagogue. And it was not long before the truth occasioned more than inconvenience. The sword awoke against the shepherd, against the man who was described as Jehovah's fellow, and the

malice of unbelievers effected the great sacrifice that was offered for the sins of the world. The bitter enmity which the unbelieving Jews had felt and shown to the blessed Jesus, they transferred in all its intenseness to his disciples. Stephen is stoned, and Peter and John imprisoned, and James beheaded. While the history of the life of Paul, subsequently to his conversion, is but the history of the persecution he met with from his exasperated countrymen.

Gentile opposition was (from the very first) declared quite as plainly, though at first in a different way. The Gospel was to the Greeks, *i. e.* to the cultivated nations of the world, foolishness; and when they heard the preaching of the Apostles, it was but to find it absurd and ridiculous. But their mockery was soon turned into cruel hatred. The Romans unsheathed against the Church the unrelenting weapon which had subdued the world; and the cross, and the sword, and the amphitheatre, did their work for nearly three centuries on the once despised, but now hated, com-

munity. Ten bloody persecutions inflicted by heathen Rome, afford a sad illustration of our Lord's words, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

We cannot trace with equal certainty the reception which the Gospel met with from the less civilised nations of the ancient world. The history of the Church tells of barbarous tribes which were visited by the messengers of salvation: and in almost every instance it records the martyrdom of the messengers. The records of later times illustrate the process. Some souls are rescued from the general ruin. But the spirit of opposition is roused against the truth, and unless there be a special interference of the God of providence, the cause of truth is destroyed by brutal violence. The Lord "came not to send peace, but a sword."

We might deduce the history from the age of the Apostles to our own time. We might show how seasonable in all ages has been the Saviour's warning, how necessary it has been at all times for believers to be

prepared to expect that their faith would expose them to persecution. But we must now confine the application of the words to our circumstances, and during the remainder of this discourse, inquire what instruction and comfort we may derive from the remarkable words, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

Now it will, I suppose, be conceded, that the words *have* an application to our own time and circumstances; and that while there is evil remaining in the world, we must expect that the Gospel will not produce peace on earth, but rather division. That while its effects on the individual who is brought under its influence, will be the peaceable fruits of righteousness; its effect with regard to the world will be to set one against another, and often to separate those who in opinion and sentiment ought to be but one. I say that this application of the words will probably be conceded. Because in point of fact there is not one among us, who is not upon his own principles obliged to concede it. A family, suppose, is em-

barked in common crime. The grace of God is implanted in the heart of a member of that family, and he is brought under the influence of the Gospel. There is an immediate breaking up of their unholy union. The man is immediately at variance with all who were the partners of his sin. For he can no longer partake in what he knows to be wrong, and they cannot find any satisfaction in intercourse with one whose very presence is a reproach to them. The bond of union may be friendship, or kindred, or acquaintance—it matters not—it cannot resist the influence of the superior principle. If the connection was one of evil, the Gospel will sever it—it will be to it a sword. Now here is a case about which all must be agreed, and it throws a strong light on what our Lord meant, when he said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

There are many things forbidden by the Gospel, which it is very difficult to prove to be criminal to one who is not under the spirit of the Gospel. The love of Christ

constrains the believer to many a duty, which it is not easy to find distinctly required by the express words of Scripture. Not that there is any real practical difficulty in Christian morals—not that with such maxims as that which bids us do whatsoever we do in word or deed in the name of the Lord Jesus, and that which tells us to do all, whatsoever we do, to the glory of God, and with the Spirit of God directing us, we may not steer in safety through all the dangers of our course, and reach at length the desired haven—but till by grace we have been made to feel the holiness of God, and the strictness of His law, we are not likely to appreciate the requirements of the Gospel, for we know nothing of its real character and spirit. But the Christian knows it. He regards himself as a lost sinner—owing all to the free mercy of God—bought with a price, and therefore bound to glorify God with his body and his spirit, which are God's. Feeling the "mercies of God, he presents his body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, his reasonable ser-

vice." And in the course of what he does, he will infallibly do much which will expose him to the world's hatred. His time is God's—he cannot waste his time. His talents, whatever they are, are God's; he cannot pervert them. He is zealous for the honour of God; he cannot therefore with unconcern hear sinful language, or witness sinful conduct. In short, he cannot act on the world's maxims, or join in the world's pursuits and amusements. And what is the consequence? The world hates him—and many of those whom once he loved, or esteemed and honoured the most, dislike him or despise him; and, cut off in sentiment from what he may perhaps have held dearest, he is a living commentary on the Lord's words, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

There can be no doubt about the effect. There is no denying, that if a man does consistently act upon principle, and, keeping his eye upon the pillar that moves before him, follows its guidance wherever it may lead, he will have a full measure of

the world's enmity; and, except under very peculiar circumstances, he will meet with opposition. But what is the cause of this? Why should the best, and the holiest, and the most admirable, be often treated as the offscouring of all things? Simply because the world is an evil world, because it is under the power of sin, and because the principle which is supreme in the Christian is utterly at variance with the principle which is supreme in the world. There are some substances in nature that are of such a different character, that they *cannot* be brought to combine: they are not more opposed to one another than are the spirit of the world, and the spirit of the Gospel.

My brethren, what do we learn from this subject? That we must expect opposition in a consistent course of duty—we learn *that* from the whole tenor of Scripture. If we are really impressed with a sense of what we owe to God, we cannot have the friendship of the world. The world may admire us, and esteem us—and we are not what we should be, unless the world is forced to regard us with esteem

and admiration—but it will not love us. We must not let it love us; we must not conform to it; we must not advance a single step from duty to gain its approbation. "Marvel not, my brethren," says St. John, "if the world hate you." And the Lord himself says, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

But let none of us provoke opposition. If we are Christians indeed, we must walk circumspectly. The eyes of the world must be upon us; and it will be the melancholy consequence of our falling, that weak brethren may be offended, and that the enemies of the Lord will have occasion to blaspheme. From the fact that His disciples are exposed to the world's hatred, our Lord argues the necessity of prudence and uprightness—"Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

Once more. None of these things are to move us: no opposition, no love of pre-

sent convenience, no desire to be at peace with the world, must induce us to abandon Christian principle. And may the Holy Spirit impress on our hearts the words of the Saviour, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it."

SERMON X.

WORLDLY WISDOM.

St. Luke xvi. 8.

"The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

These words express the moral of our blessed Lord's parable of the unjust steward. A steward is accused to his master of improvidence and peculation, and is called upon to make up his account. Conscious of his misconduct, and perceiving that it would be impossible to satisfy his injured employer, or to gain another employment of the same kind, with his damaged character, he immediately falls to speculating how he is to live after he has been turned out of his present easy and respectable situation. He has not been used to bodily

labour, he has never been in the habit of submitting to mortifying obligations. "I cannot dig," he says to himself; "to beg I am ashamed." He was not long in bethinking himself of an expedient to help him out of his difficulties; for his inventive genius was not confined by the bondage of honesty. He had, probably, trained himself by his petty knaveries for a bold stroke in fraud. By neglecting his master's interests, he had prepared the way for taking high rank as a scoundrel. Lulling to sleep his remaining scruples by the villain's plea, necessity, he determined to procure himself friends by making a sweeping sacrifice of his master's substance. He falsified the accounts, with which he was entrusted, in the way most calculated to gain the favour of his lord's debtors; that is, by giving them the benefit of his knavery. He thus secured himself an asylum in his adversity. For these unscrupulous debtors would be at his mercy; and when he was turned out of his stewardship, would be anxious to keep him quiet, by taking him into their houses, and providing for his wants. It was

an ingenious scheme. Even his master, who was the sufferer by it, was obliged to confess its merit as a stroke of policy. "He commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." That is, while he exposed and discarded him, he allowed that he had acted with address and sagacity. And our Lord founds upon it the striking remark, that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The words are well worthy of our most serious attention. May He who spoke them, bless them to our instruction!

The general sense of our Lord's remark is evident, though it contains some unusual expressions. "The children of this world," *i. e.* worldly men, who adopt and act upon the principles which prevail in the world, "are in their generation," *i. e.* in their manner of life, and general conduct, as the phrase means in some other places of Holy Scripture, "wiser," or more prudent, "than the children of light," *i. e.* than persons enlightened by the Spirit of God, or believers.

Before we proceed to illustrate the truth and wisdom of this remark, it may be well

to make one observation on the way in which it is connected with the parable. The instance to which it immediately applies, is one of positive dishonesty. The unjust steward is a thoroughly worthless and unprincipled man: but it is to his worldliness that our Lord's remark applies, rather than to his dishonesty. It was the ingenuity and prudence of his conduct which our Lord had in view, rather than its moral quality. We are fully justified in taking the words in their widest meaning. I shall consider "the children of this world" as forming one great class, agreeing in several great leading points, though differing among themselves in various particulars, more or less important, especially as to the article of conscientiousness And in the remarks I am about to make, I shall omit all the circumstances of discrimination, and regard them as distinguished by that one point in which they all agree —their worldliness.

Our Lord, then, asserts that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light;" and as

to the fact of their superior wisdom, evidently proposes their conduct as an example for our imitation. The fact cannot be doubted; it has only to be examined to appear indisputable.

The wisdom of the children of this world, as it was exhibited in the conduct of the unjust steward, is particularly apparent in their *foresight*. The worldly man whom our Lord exhibited in the parable, was no sooner in danger of losing his situation, then he set himself to look out for the means of living without it. He saw that he was about to be turned out upon the world without employment. He saw great difficulties before him. But he does not fold his arms, and allow events to take their course. He is not content to be the sport of fortune, and take up with what may come in his way at the moment. He makes it his business to have a plan. And thus it is with worldly men. They look forward, and gaze as deep as they can into the future. There are persons who live entirely to the present, who live without foresight, who

leave themselves to circumstances; and allow themselves to be tossed about without doing any thing to direct their own course. But these are lazy men, or insipid and weak men. The world will not own them. They are the tools of worldly men, or the materials with which they raise their fortunes. Worldly men are never without foresight. They may be mistaken —their plans may be thwarted, just as the unjust steward's was; but they are never deficient in foresight. All they do is calculated with a view to something which is in the distance. They are busily employed in seeking for their future good. They are saving or spending, or slaving or idling, to effect some ulterior purpose. The men who live for the present moment, your spendthrifts and profligates—are the very scorn of the worldly man. His notion of happiness is very different from theirs; and he labours to realise it in a very different way. He makes no sacrifices to present indulgence, but forms his plan, and shapes his conduct, in the way he deems best calculated to accomplish it.

In this the conduct of the children of this world is evidently an example to the children of light. The Christian is called to live to the future. He is to keep in view the account he has to render at the Divine judgment-seat, and remember the reward that is laid up in heaven for those who die in the Lord. What he does *now* ought to be directed to his future condition. He must not waste a moment: if he would honour God, and secure the great object of life, he must husband every moment, and employ all his powers in one constant effort to attain the glorious reversion which is to be enjoyed in heaven. But in this point, namely, foresight, "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." We see in those who profess to be under the influence of Christian principles, little of that steadfast devotion to one object, which is remarkable in men of the world. They are not cautious of contracting bad habits; they are not careful to secure every favourable opportunity; they do not direct all they do to one point, as the

children of this world do, when they wish to effect a favourite scheme. Their future condition often seems to be out of their thoughts altogether. They allow other objects to distract their attention and usurp their affections. They often seem to live, as if they were going to live on earth for ever. And instead of preparing systematically for the future, they appear too often to have forgotten their vocation. The world may teach them a valuable lesson—they will not see a similar weakness there. For the god of this world is served by more provident servants, than those who profess to be in the service of Jehovah.

Again, the wisdom of the children of this world is evinced in their *prudence*. The contrivance by which the unjust steward sought to provide himself a refuge in his misfortunes, was ingenious and politic. It was well adapted to attain the end it had in view: it was deficient in nothing but honesty. When men have once been fascinated by worldly objects, and have fairly yielded to the desire of what the world has to bestow, they rarely fail in

devising plans sufficiently well adapted to compass their wishes. In the most unfavourable circumstances, and with the most unsuitable materials, you will see them laying the most ingenious schemes, and getting to work with the greatest address and policy. They calculate the difficulties which stand in their way. They take into account their own infirmities: they summon to their aid all the assistance they can procure from without.—They labour to remedy all the defects which may be apprehended from their own weakness; and they apply themselves warily and subtilely to effect their object. They do what they do, with their eyes open. They do not allow themselves to be surprised or deluded. The man who would lead them astray, must have a smooth tongue, and more than common talents. Whether the object they have in view is what men account great, or what they would allow to be trivial and unimportant, you will see worldly men pursuing it with dexterity and prudence. Their conduct thus regarded is *edifying*.

For we are, alas! obliged to confess that in this particular "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

For we see little of this systematic prudence exercised in the concerns of the soul. Men who call themselves Christians are rarely found acting in their holy calling with the wisdom which is so remarkable in men of the world. They do not study as they ought to do, to know what the Gospel is, though it is quite clear they cannot really be what they profess to be, till they thoroughly understand its principles, and have entered deeply into its spirit. They are content to take up with loose and common notions, instead of inquiring steadfastly and painfully what is the teaching of the Church, and the Scriptures; and are content to be blown about by every wind of doctrine, instead of looking for instruction to those who are set over them in the Lord. They do not carefully examine themselves with a view to get a fair estimate of their own character. They often trust themselves

most in the very points in which they are weakest; and go forth to do battle with their spiritual enemies, their vital parts being entirely exposed. We see little caution exercised to avoid temptation, or to break its force; little care used to form habits which may be of service in the spiritual course. Among the first elements of Christian knowledge, we are taught the necessity of self-mortification and circumspection. And yet the greater number of those who profess to be living under a sense of their baptismal engagements, appear to be living carelessly and confidently, without any sacrifice of indulgence, without any particular regard to their daily feelings and conduct. So that they keep clear of gross sins, and abstain from open violations of the divine law, they are not particularly careful to watch their thoughts, and discipline their characters. They think it a slight matter to offend with their tongues, and wound the feelings of those with whom they have to do, by sharpness and unkindness. Yet these things ought to be done. We

must be made here, what we are to be for ever. Being bought with a price, we are to glorify God with our body and our spirit. The longer we delay what is to be done, the harder it is to do it. Let us imitate, then, the prudence of worldly men, who in their unworthy cares are wiser than those who claim to be regarded as the children of life.

Once more, the wisdom of the children of this world is superior to that of the children of light, in their greater *energy*. Look again at the conduct of the unjust steward. No sooner had he formed his deep-laid scheme, than he proceeded to act upon it. He has no misgivings or hesitation. He is well aware that nothing can be done well, that is not done with vigour and dispatch. He enters upon the business at once, and in earnest: and this is the way with worldly men. One of the most conspicuous maxims of their shrewd practical philosophy, leads them to go to work in earnest. They appropriate that maxim of the wise man:—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy

might." They do not slumber over their business, or address themselves to it sluggishly and heartlessly, as if they had not satisfied themselves whether they ought to be doing it at all, but go to it eagerly and vigorously. They may not think it necessary to do it hastily—great things are usually better done with deliberation and caution—but they throw their hearts into the matter. They accomplish it as soon as they can. They do not vacillate, or take fright at small difficulties. Having put their hands to the plough, they do not look back; and the consequence is, that they are generally successful. The man who has set his heart on making a fortune, and carries out his plans with resolution, generally succeeds. The man who has fixed his eyes upon power and station, and lays his schemes with the sagacity which is characteristic of worldliness, by perseverance usually succeeds. But then it is because they bring to their objects this intense devotion of spirit. They do not *half do* what they are about. They do not go through with it in a lazy and perfunc-

tory way, but with zeal and ardour. They are willing to take pains about it. They are willing to watch, and fast, and undergo hardness, if they see it necessary to compass their object. In fact, they exhibit all the qualities, which, if rightly employed, would bear the names of the most precious virtues. Would that Christians equalled them! Would that in the energetic pursuit of their favourite object, the children of this world were not in their generation wiser than the children of light!

But they *are* wiser. We rarely see any one who, in the concerns of the soul, displays the energy which we just noticed. Though the immense importance of religion is *theoretically* acknowledged, the moment people in general begin to see a man acting in earnest in the matter, they denounce him as an enthusiast. The thing is so rare, that all their notions are disturbed by it whenever it occurs. And yet it is only strange, because it is so reasonable. What would men think, if Christians would act consistently, and be as wise in their generation as the men of the

world? In good truth, they would be very different from what they are now. Their prayers would be more frequent and ardent, their self-examination would be more earnest, their self-mortification would be more severe, their noble conduct would be more correct and exemplary. But as things now are, the children of light are greatly inferior, in the energy of their conduct, to the children of this world. They manifest little resolution of character. They seem little disposed to take the kingdom of heaven by violence. While the children of this world are toiling night and day in their occupations, and are straining every nerve to effect the purposes which they have in view, Christians are scarcely bestirring themselves to gain the prize of their high calling of God in Christ Jesus. True it is that their "strength is to sit still." That they are not to make haste, or exert themselves in the world's fashion; but in this quiet, docile course, they are to be diligent and active. They ought to be watching for their Lord; they ought to be pilgrims incessantly journeying

to the heavenly Jerusalem; they ought to be soldiers fighting manfully under the banner of the Captain of their salvation, clad in the panoply of faith and holiness, and brandishing the sword of the Spirit. In the world, with meekness and prudence they may forward their Master's cause. In solitude, in all seasons, they may be cultivating their own spirits. They may be learning to exercise a more simple faith, to entertain a more lively hope, to feel a more ardent love. They have to contend with the obstacles which impede their spiritual progress: to overcome unbelief, to resist their natural indolence and inaptitude for spiritual employments, and to get the mastery over their lusts. To do this effectually, they must know themselves, must feel their peculiar infirmities, must be conversant with Divine truth. Here are objects that require the exertion of the greatest energy. Here is a field for the exercise of the most unfailing diligence. We may well avail ourselves of every aid, and thankfully follow the example which our blessed Lord sets before us, when He

reminds us that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

The subject might profitably be treated in detail; we might carry the comparison much further. But enough has been said to illustrate the words of the text. Let us endeavour to apply it to our conduct. Let the spectacle which the world sets before us, painful as it is to those who regard it in the light of Christian knowledge, teach us wisdom. Even the voluptuary is in earnest in pursuit of pleasure; the merely indolent man is at some pains to indulge his sloth. Every point in the view is full of admonition and instruction. May God Almighty grant us hearts to receive it, and profit by it, that we, for our parts, may at length learn wisdom, and, with the aid of that grace which can alone effectually strengthen us from time to time, become less exposed to the reproaches contained in our Lord's complaint, that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

SERMON XI.

THE STRAIT GATE.

ST. LUKE xiii. 24.

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

IT is one of the most gratifying parts of the duty of those who are commissioned to preach the gospel, to enlarge upon those various passages of the inspired volume which proclaim the freeness of salvation, and to remind their hearers of the Saviour's assurance, that those "that come to him he will in no wise cast out." We willingly recur to words which express encouragement and invitation, and delight in the attempt to kindle in your hearts the grati-

tude which is due to Him who "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But we may not confine ourselves to such topics. We dare not encourage the delusion of those who require us to speak only "smooth things." (Isa. xxx. 19.) It is our business to "declare unto you the whole counsel of God;" and in the faithful discharge of our office we must from time to time call your attention to passages that inculcate painful duties, and hold out fearful warnings. Such a passage is the text, which sets before us a precept and a warning too; and is the more deserving of attentive examination, as containing an apparent difficulty which confessedly stands in need of explanation. May the Holy Spirit bless us in our attempt to understand it!

Men are always more ready to concern themselves with matters which are suggested by a restless curiosity, than with things of infinitely higher importance. The words of the text form part of our Lord's reply to an inquirer who wished to extract from him an answer to an unprofitable

question. "Then said one unto him, Lord are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." It cannot concern us to know what will be the number of those that are saved. It concerns us greatly that we should exert ourselves that we attain salvation; and it should make us thankful to hear our Lord himself declare, that "many will seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able."

Though our Lord did not give any direct answer to the question which occasioned

the remarks I have read—though it does not appear that he made any answer to it at all—it is clear from what he says, that he meant his hearers to infer that he answered it in the affirmative. "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" He answered not the question. It was a subject he had spoken upon before. "He said unto them,"—namely, his disciples, of whom probably the inquirer was one,—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate;" evidently meaning to say: You know that few will be saved, inasmuch as I have already asserted, on a very public occasion, that "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Strive ye to be yourselves among the number: "for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Now the former part of the words of the text requires not illustration. It is perfectly clear what our Lord intended, when he required those who heard him to "strive to enter in at the strait gate." He recommended them to exert them-

selves to gain admission into heaven, and warned them that it was an attempt that implied labour and difficulty. It is the latter part to which I would call your attention. With the precept we are probably all of us familiar: I would invite you to consider the sanction by which it is here enforced; namely, "that many shall seek to enter in, who shall not be able."

The words evidently allude to the figurative representations of future happiness which so frequently occur in the discourses of our Lord. Under the image of a marriage-feast, or a supper, he repeatedly exhibited to his hearers the future condition of his people, and pictured the misery of the unbelieving and impenitent as an exclusion from a royal entertainment.

In the text he represents admission as obtained only by a narrow and difficult entrance, through which he exhorts his disciples to exert themselves with all their might to struggle (for such is the force of the original word) to obtain admittance.

And that they may use the greater perseverance, and act with the greater energy, he warns them that a time shall come when no desire will avail, no efforts be effectual. "For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Now it is not, I think, possible to read these words, without feeling that we are just as much concerned with them as those to whom they were originally addressed. There is nothing in them which confines their application to a particular generation, or to any one set of persons. We are all commanded to "strive to enter in at the strait gate;" and we are all reminded that "many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

We may live in thoughtlessness and delusion, putting darkness for light, and light for darkness; calling evil good, and good evil—or caring for none of these things; but death must awaken and undeceive us. We may live with scarcely a thought of heaven. But "when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the

door," when the great change shall have taken place, things must be different with us. The most hardened, the most careless, the most thoroughly worldly, will feel his condition then. The truth will burst in upon him with fearful power. He will be at once overpowered with terror at the prospect of exclusion from the happiness which he has hitherto despised. He will "begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us." But it will be too late for importunity. The season of grace is past; the final doom of every one is then determined. "He shall answer and say unto them, I know you not whence ye are." And though in their despair they "shall begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets," those external privileges will not avail them. He shall say, "I know not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." We know so little of the state of things beyond the grave, except the broad and impressive outlines, that it is not easy to determine the time to which we must

assign the awful scene thus represented in our Lord's description. But these unavailing prayers, these importunities of despair, this desiring to enter in, and not being able, may form part of the misery of those souls in torment, who see the saints in Abraham's bosom, from whom they are separated by the great gulf that forms an impassable barrier, while they await the final judgment which will be pronounced at the resurrection. But whether it describes the condition of the unbelieving souls in the intermediate state, or refers to what takes place only after the sentence passed at the great day, to us it matters not; death settles our condition for eternity. Though when the invisible world has opened upon our sight, unbelief gives way to sense, and every heart feels a thrilling desire of admission to the happiness of the blessed, the desire which first springs up then is unavailing; the prayer then uttered is vain and worthless; the wretched applicant can plead no saving interest in the Redeemer; the outward privileges which he recalls to memory in his despair, only show the justice of his

condemnation, for they never had any moral effect on his soul; and then, when under a sense of misery from the violence of torment, he "seeks to enter in, he shall not be able!"

This seems to be the immediate and primary meaning of the words; and thus regarded, they furnish us with abundant matter for profitable meditation. There is only one way of avoiding the miserable condition of the unhappy beings who are abandoned to perdition without a hope of mercy. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." It is now our privilege to be told of Him "who is the way, the truth, and the life." We are invited to share the blessings of the Gospel. Now it is with us "the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." We are exhorted to walk worthy of the vocation with which we are called, and are promised grace sufficient to enable us successfully to encounter every obstacle which may impede our spiritual progress. But let none of us delay repentance, or procrastinate in renouncing sin, and in entering by the strait gate; for

though we may still be allowed to cumber the ground in a state of protracted impenitence, we may at length be hardened, so that even before death should we seek to enter in, we should not be able.

It is for Him to pardon sin against whom it is committed. And it is a blessed truth that the Redeemer has made satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. It is an awful usurpation of God's prerogative, to usurp the office of pronouncing judgment, or to presume to limit the Divine attribute of mercy. But general as are the offers of pardon, they are addressed only to the penitent and believing; and we have not the slightest reason to expect any share in the Gospel salvation, for those whose hearts remain hardened by impenitence and unbelief. We can enter into heaven only by the strait gate. This we all feel and acknowledge. What is it, then, that makes so many content to remain in a worldly and sinful state, when they know that while such is their condition, they are without any ground to hope for future peace? It is evidently the expectation

that they may turn to God when they will—that they may begin to strive to enter in at the strait gate when they find it convenient. But to such, the text pronounces a terrible warning—"many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

We all perceive that death finishes our probation; that what we die, we must remain for ever. But is our probation never finished before death? Is it really the case that we may at any time set about the work of repentance? The dying thief believed, and was pardoned. True, and while there is life, there is no ground for us to say there is room for despair. With God nothing is impossible. But what is the ordinary course of his dealings with us? Did He not once say of obstinate transgressors, "I will not always strive with man?" And is there not reason to think that there are many now who outlive the season of repentance? We may not say, we may not think, that God's mercy is limited. But his mercy is only exercised towards those who turn to him in a sense of guilt; and we know that it

is no uncommon case for men to sin themselves into a state of recklessness and apathy.

We are now addressed by the invitations of the Word of God: we may now accept the offers of salvation. But what right have we to prescribe a lengthened season for our time of grace? If we reject the offers of grace now, what ground have we to expect that we may continue to have the opportunity? On the contrary, is there not every reason to expect that every moment of delay adds to the probability of our final rejection? Experience, and the whole analogy of nature, lead us to think, that the difficulty of conversion is immensely augmented by procrastination.

We talk of the force of habit; we call it a second nature: we congratulate ourselves upon having contracted habits which are favourable to our pursuits, and loudly regret that we have ever allowed ourselves to form such as are adverse to our present comfort or advancement. When we have formed a habit of indolence, it is not easy, perhaps I may say it is not possible, for us

to succeed in any object which requires perseverance and energy. When we have formed a habit of procrastination, it is not likely that we shall at once succeed, even if we exert ourselves to perform what we have to do with regularity and dispatch. We have so long done every thing in a particular way, that we cannot all at once do it otherwise. We would wish perhaps to change. It may be urgently necessary that we should change; but we cannot. The unfortunate habit has become part of ourselves. It would be to become something altogether different, to renounce it; and it is likely that we shall carry it with us to the grave.

Now let us take these familiar facts with us, to guide us to spiritual wisdom. If we cannot shake off an ill habit that impedes our temporal success, without encountering difficulties which are scarcely to be surmounted, how are we to forsake sins in which we indulge our natural inclinations, and perhaps advance our present welfare? If we find it difficult to disengage ourselves from a habit now, it

will be much more difficult after we have allowed it to gain a greater influence over us. The longer it exercises an ascendancy, the stronger it becomes, and the harder it becomes to abandon it. The further we are advanced in years, the less equal are we to any great exertion. The guilt of a sinful line of conduct becomes much less perceptible to us, much less painful and burdensome to the conscience, the longer it is indulged. And if at last the sinner awakes from his long slumber, and desires to regain the path of holiness, his sin has taken such deep root, and spread so widely, that he cannot clear it from his heart. He may "seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

A long indulgence of sin of any sort subjects the soul to a thraldom, the force of which it is not easy to calculate. The very habit of calling evil good, and good evil, has fearful consequences. Those who at first can scarce venture to laugh at sin, at length come to be absolutely unable to see sin to be sinful. They seem to lose the power of admiring moral ex-

cellence, or even of perceiving in what it consists. You may on a death-bed call upon them, after a life spent in irregularities, to turn to God, and you will be astonished to find the extent of their moral insensibility. We sometimes think that though it may be difficult to prove, to a person of amiable disposition and decent conduct, that he is in the sight of God a miserable sinner, there can be no difficulty in bringing a conviction of his sinfulness home to the mind of one who has violated the decencies of life, and the plain precepts of regularity and temperance. But there is a difficulty. The unhappy beings who have been given up to gratify their appetites, at last come to have little or no sense of the enormity of their conduct. They have some good points—they only yielded to strong temptation—they hope to be accepted. When you talk to them of repentance, they cannot enter into the purity of God's law, or see what is meant by conversion. They would escape the wrath to come, because they fear what is in its nature so

terrible; but they have no feeling for the beauty of holiness, no conviction of the duty of obedience. It is too late to impart instruction when life is fast receding: though they may seek to enter in, they are not able.

But we need not go to the death-bed—we may speak of some who are in health and vigour, and who are not without a sense of the sinfulness of sin. They are pursuing a sinful course in spite of conscience. They would wish, they seriously wish, to renounce their sin. But such is their connection with others—such the force of circumstances—that they cannot feel themselves at their own disposal. They have gone on so long in forbidden pleasures—they have so involved themselves in the toils which have been set for their ruin—that they can find no way to disengage themselves. Though they seek to enter in, they are not able. We are most of us acquainted with such cases. We cannot be much acquainted with mankind, without having met with instances of persons who have wished to disengage

themselves from a sinful course of life when it is too late. I need not be more specific. But let us take warning. Let us take heed that no sin get the mastery over us. If we have been overtaken in a fault; let us go to him who will pardon and restore us. Let us *strive* to enter in at the strait gate, ere it be closed upon us for ever.

Much more might be said in illustration of this view of the subject. We may not in any thing delay with impunity. Habits and pursuits, that are not in themselves sinful, may gradually place us in a less favourable situation for commencing the business of salvation—for attending to the concerns of the soul. If the heart is unguarded, it will soon be filled with what is evil. If we think to attend to the care of the soul at some future time, we evince a sad ignorance of the real nature of our condition. If we delay now, we can answer for nothing — a thousand things may throw such difficulties in our way, that though we seek to enter in, we shall not be able.

I have treated this important subject very imperfectly: I would entreat you to make it the subject of your private meditation. Think of the difficulties which increasing years, and multiplied cares, throw in the way of repentance and walking with God. But let nothing which I have said induce any to think that I limit the power of divine grace. We are all among "the called;" why should we deny ourselves the privilege of being among "the chosen?" In dependence on the Holy Spirit's assistance, which is freely promised to us, let us address ourselves to the Saviour for pardon of the guilt of sin, and deliverance from its power.

SERMON XII.

THE NECESSITY OF TRIBULATION.

Acts xiv. 22.

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

The clause of which these words form a part describes the nature of the preaching which the Apostles Paul and Barnabas addressed to their converts. After having advanced in their journey as far as Derbe, "when they had preached the gospel in that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom

of God." They did not attempt to deceive the persons who had received their teaching—they did not talk of brighter days, or beguile them with hopes of a fairer morrow —No, they invited them to count the cost of their profession—they prepared them for a life of suffering. We scarcely need any other evidence of the Divine authority of their commission. This neglect of common prudence proves at once that they felt themselves to be in no need of the precautions of human policy. The finger of God was so visibly with them, that they were not required to avail themselves of the ordinary topics of persuasion. Many of the persons they addressed had actually seen them performing miracles, and had been forced to acknowledge them as messengers from heaven; yea, some of them, in the blindness of paganism, had regarded them as manifestations of their deities. They could therefore speak to them with authority, and venture without apprehension to prepare them for what was in store for them as Christians; and urge it as a motive for perseverance, and an inducement to

faith, "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven." The fact deserves attention. We are apt to read it without being struck by it as we ought to be. If affords the strongest possible proof, not only of the candour and openness of these holy men, but of their confidence in the strength of their cause. The teachers who had hitherto in heathen cities founded sects, and exerted an influence on men's opinions, had always set to work by undertaking to shew the way to happiness: the Christian missionaries pursue a course diametrically opposite. They make no profession of teaching wisdom, or eloquence, or pleasure. They have no specious arguments, no arts of allurement. The doctrine they preach is to those who first hear, a stumbling-block or foolishness; and they promise their disciples, as their present lot, only tribulation. That under such circumstances churches were formed, and disciples multiplied, is, I say, sufficient proof that the first preaching of the Gospel was attested by the visible interference of Heaven.

It was well that we should have the proof which is afforded by this circumstance. As we no longer see the miracles, it is satisfactory for us to possess this indirect proof that miracles were performed. And we cannot be too grateful for any thing that tends to strengthen our intellectual conviction of the Divine authority of the Gospel. But it is not as a point of evidence that I bring the subject before you. It is one which has claims upon our attention upon very different grounds. It is well for us to go as deep as we can into the nature of our present condition, that we should accurately understand the true character of our Christian calling. The words of the Apostles throw much light upon these points. May God grant that we may at this time be led by his Holy Spirit into the full meaning of the inspired statement, "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The warning is quite intelligible in its application to the first Christians. With respect to them, there was nothing figu-

rative in what our Lord and his Apostles declared would be the consequences of embracing the Gospel. They found that it was most literally true that He had "come not to send peace on earth, but a sword." From the first they found themselves called to a life of suffering and danger. Were they Jews, they were treated by their countrymen as renegades; were they Gentiles, they were regarded by their acquaintances as deluded by a barbarous superstition. But it was not merely contempt and mocking which they had to suffer. As the Church increased, the selfishness of those who were interested in the maintenance of the ancient errors led them to have recourse to more general persecution; and it was not long before the Christians had to endure the spoiling of their goods, and to stand in constant jeopardy of their lives for the sake of the Lord Jesus. An evil world recoiled in alarm from the first contact of a system so pure as the Gospel. And such was the violence with which believers were treated, that it was most literally to take up the

cross, to enter upon the service of the Saviour.

But these days of persecution were shortened. The leaven which had been introduced into ancient civilized society, soon leavened the whole lump. And within three centuries the cross was regarded by the potentates of the world as the symbol of what was most venerable and holy. Society itself assumed the forms of Christianity, and the Church became coextensive with civilization. What then became the condition of Christians? Were they still called to suffering? Was it still their lot "through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of God?" History returns a very plain answer to these questions. Though the Church has long been treated with greater favour by the great and powerful, individual Christians have been still called to suffer. The powers of darkness have not been remiss in stirring up against them persecution and difficulties. And we trace in various ways the manifestation of such a regular hostility to true holiness, that we are obliged to conclude

that it is required by a constant law, that we should "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

It is long since there has been among ourselves, for instance, any authorized persecution for conscience' sake; yet who can doubt that in the exercise of a strictly conscientious course of conduct we must suffer tribulation? A consistent course of Christian conduct still exposes a man to contempt and censure, if not to violence and danger. The great bulk of mankind, even in Christian countries, are far from feeling as they ought the obligations of Christianity, and are ever ready to join in venting their malice on those whose principles and conduct reproach them with their own unfaithfulness.

The man who is determined to live as a Christian, must even now regard himself as called to suffer tribulation. If before he sets out upon a consistent course of duty he would count the cost, he must be prepared to expect general dislike and opposition. In the society of a party, or under the particular circumstances of a neigh-

bourhood, we may be led to fancy that the days of persecution have passed away, and that mankind have at length been taught to acknowledge the rights of conscience. While we follow the maxims of a numerous body, and hold a language which has been consecrated by common usage; while we employ received terms, and acquiesce in the views of those who are held in reputation,—we may doubtless exhibit very great strictness, and use the language of piety. The Pharisees, strict as they were, enjoyed great popularity among their countrymen. But we must not turn aside by a single hair from the fashionable devotion. We must not venture to question a single notion which has been talked into vogue by the clatter of vulgar ignorance—we must not express a doubt of the soundness of common opinions—or we shall speedily find that we had grievously deceived ourselves, in supposing ourselves in an age of toleration. For the old magazine of ill names and misconstruction is still open; and there are hands without number ready, at short warning, to avail themselves of

these compendious instruments of annoyance. It is as easy as ever to talk about fanaticism and bigotry—to set it to the account of enthusiasm if a man is in earnest in a good cause, and to sneer at his narrowness of mind if he cannot be prevailed upon to follow a multitude to do evil. Other names are at hand, if there be other purposes to serve. And the course which malice actually takes, makes it manifest, that it is not that it wants the *will*, if it does not proceed to overt acts of persecution.

I would not have what I say misunderstood, to encourage the restlessness and scrupulosity which seek occasions of offence, and delight in opposition. It is very easy to expose ourselves to unnecessary difficulties. But this does not form part of what the Christian is called to. The examples of Scripture are sufficient to guard us against any misapprehension on this head. What I would remark is, that opposition and persecution in some shape is the uniform consequence of consistency. It is scarcely too much to say, that there is

ground to suspect ourselves of unfaithfulness, if we are not in this sense in tribulation. The spirit of Christianity, mild and peaceable as it is, knows nothing of that sort of conciliation which will suppress or explain away every thing that captious men may feel disposed to cavil at. The Church will have us take our station upon the faith, and suffer whatever may befal, rather than give up one particle. When she puts into our hands that shield of heavenly temper, and points us to the battle, we may hear her tell us, like the Spartan mother, "Return with it, or upon it." To have it wrested from us, or to throw it away, is to forfeit all. Yet it cannot be worn without subjecting us to opposition. It bears upon it the symbol which the world pursues with the most deadly enmity. It never sees the cross borne gallantly by the Christian soldier, without marking him out for vengeance, without treating him as a foe. And this hostility is not altogether unprovoked. If we really act upon the principles we profess, and boldly judge of things with a righteous judgment, we must

continually be in opposition to those around us. Even persons of whose sincerity we would hope well, will, from time to time, be found pursuing a course which a really enlightened conscience cannot approve. The mass of men are always content to take up with common notions without examination. The Christian is always disposed to distrust his own judgment, and to yield himself to the guidance of authority in all things lawful; but he will not follow the multitude, because it is the multitude; he recognises no authority, but in God's appointments and in truth. He fears not man: he regards not his threats; he desires not his favour for any motive of gain; and the consequence is, that he is always likely to have his hostility. He is contemned as one who is beside himself, and reproached as one who troubles Israel.

But we must not linger on this part of the subject. It is not in this way only that the text is applicable to the present condition of believers. This is indeed its first and most obvious meaning. But the principle on which it proceeds, is worked

out in other ways. Every part of our condition bears testimony to the fact that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

We are fallen creatures, who by nature are very far gone from original righteousness. The mercy of God has devised and made known to us a wonderful plan, by which we may not only be restored to original righteousness, but elevated to a higher condition of happiness and glory. But what a process is needed for the object! The Son of God becomes incarnate, and in our nature suffers and dies for us. He invites all men to receive the benefits of his life and death, and extends to all who come to him the blessings of pardon and sanctification. But in imparting to us the blessings which he has procured, he treats us as we really are. Pardon he bestows as a free gift; but in applying the remedy to our spiritual maladies, he leads us through a suitable course of discipline, adapted in perfect wisdom to effect his gracious purposes upon our souls. To wean our affections from the present, to make

us feel our need of Divine assistance, to put us on our guard against the enemies of our salvation, he often visits us with afflictions and chastisements: thus making us feel the nature of our present condition, and helping us to regard our relations to the things seen, and the things not seen, in the light in which they are presented by his word.

We have here no continuing city. The Christian is to live as one travelling to a better country. His heavenly Father is pledged to afford him the assistance necessary to enable him to complete his journey. The heart of man cleaves to earth. We naturally seize present enjoyment—and in present enjoyment forget our calling. There are few who can enjoy prosperity unharmed. And wherever it is needful, or salutary, God sends affliction. The more precious we are to him, the more we may expect the salutary discipline of his rod. "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom

the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Affliction, regarded in the light in which it is thus put by the Apostle, must, from the very nature of things, often fall to the lot of the Christian. This is so plainly the case, that, as in our intercourse with those around us, we must almost suspect our sincerity, if we are not in some way persecuted; so in our outward condition we have cause to suspect some secret worldliness, if we are not afflicted. Our Father in heaven only knows the course of discipline which is most salutary for us. But we may well be on our guard against craving too anxiously for present happiness and prosperity, when we remember that it is the very condition of our calling, that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

But our relations to the world around us, and our outward condition, are of infinitely less importance to an immortal being, than the state and feelings of the inward man. When the kingdom of God

is set up in the soul, when the dominion of the Saviour is recognised, and the heart pants for holiness, are we to expect a state of unmixed enjoyment? No, by no means. "There is indeed no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." They are delivered from the vile bondage of the world, the flesh, and the devil. "Being justified by faith, they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Their portion is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Yet still they have much inward suffering. Sin is to them what it is not to the world. They look upon it as the greatest possible evil. It is their great care to avoid it. Yet they are sorely tempted. The greater their resistance, the more violent are the assaults, the more subtle the allurements, of their spiritual foes. They bear about them a corrupt nature, ever ready to yield to temptation, and to admit the enemy. It is to be subdued, and brought under by careful discipline, else the great cause may

be betrayed. They must form habits by laborious practice; they must find out their most dangerous weaknesses; they must be in a state of constaht activity and vigilance—or Satan may get advantage over them, or their Lord come and find them unprepared. They must "endure hardness, as good soldiers of Christ Jesus." They are called to a state which does not admit of indolence, or softness. The metaphors which the Scriptures employ to describe it, are borrowed from toil and warfare. We may not sleep at the post committed to us. When the conflict seems far away, an enemy may spring up within. Even the performance of duties and spiritual exercises, may be turned against us. Self-righteousness may succeed to remissness and disobedience. Innumerable are the devices of the enemies of our souls. Here we may not suppose that we can *rest* a moment, for "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Other causes of trouble are not wanting. The state of society and the Church is

enough to make the present life a scene of tribulation. We look out upon the world, and what do we see, but what we may call a great battle-field heaped with slaughtered souls? Our fellow-men are every where yielding to the devices or assaults of the enemy, and persisting in sin. Error in every form stalks about triumphant. The most absurd sophisms, and the most daring blasphemy, are propounded and received; while the great majority are living as if this world were their rest, and that there is no such thing to be expected as a judgment. Among those who do profess to be concerned for their future condition, the prospect is scarcely more satisfactory. Discord and schism separate those who are called Christians. In spite of the plain commands of God's words, we find numbers of serious persons setting union and peace at defiance, and making a mock at the very idea of the Church. The love of truth gives place to unworthy prejudices, and a base spirit of party. Bitterness and wailing is heard, instead of the meek accents of that love which should be the

characteristics of our profession. Even those who contend for the truth are sometimes heard employing a language, which it is hard to reconcile with the spirit required in those who profess to be disciples of Him who did not "strive, nor cry, neither did any man hear his voice in the streets." All this deeply afflicts the thoughtful Christian, who is concerned for the honour of his Lord, and the welfare of those for whom his Lord died. It all gives emphasis to the apostolical announcement, that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

But in all, the tribulation is given in mercy. In every point we may trace this —in some points we have traced it now. Whatever portion God may extend to *us*, may He send us his blessing! The salutary effect of affliction is not a natural effect. It naturally irritates and discourages us. If we would have it work God's purpose upon our souls, we must earnestly seek his grace. We must pray that it may detach our affections from the world, overcome our pride, increase our faith, en-

liven our sympathies. If we receive it thus, it will have a blessed influence upon us. We shall, as we draw nearer to the end of life, be more ready for life eternal. We shall walk as in the sight of God—we shall follow his guidance, by faith seeing Him who is invisible,—we shall learn submission to his will,—we shall enter into the kingdom of God. May He grant that it may be so with every one of us, for Jesus Christ's sake.

SERMON XIII.

ATTENDANCE ON THE LORD.

1 Cor. vii. 35.

"That ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction."

These words stand in connexion with the remarkable passage in which St. Paul communicates to the Corinthian Christians his opinion on the subject of marriage. It is a passage which bears in an uncommon degree those marks of more than human wisdom which we love to trace in Scripture. Without forgetting our present condition, or assuming a tone of accommodation to our sinful infirmities, it treats human nature just as it is. From various considerations which he fully explains, and which do not involve a particle of super-

stitious feeling, the Apostle plainly states that he regards a single life as most suitable to the Christian calling. But he distinctly declares that the subject cannot be disposed of by general rules. It must depend on the circumstances of individuals. He disclaims any intention of bringing them into bondage to unnecessary scruples, or of abridging their Christian liberty. "This I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction."

Now, independently of the general scope of the argument, we learn from these words an important duty, and without any particular reference to the subject which is immediately treated, I would call your attention to the point which the Apostle considered as of so much importance, namely, our "attending upon the Lord without distraction."

And may the Holy Spirit be with us!

Our spiritual powers are the highest faculties with which we have been endowed. Our animal part we have in

common with the brutes; our faculty of reason we enjoy in common with the unhappy beings, once holy and happy, who have fallen into a state of helpless misery. It is by possessing spiritual faculties that we rise above our present state, and hold converse with God. That a being who has such faculties should allow them to remain unexercised, is a melancholy consideration. Yet such is always the case in the natural condition of man. Till we are brought under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we are dead in trespasses and sins, and we are strangers to the high employments to which we are destined. A being endowed with spiritual powers was evidently intended for the service of God, the Father of spirits. Formed as we are with a complex nature, in our present condition we are necessarily engaged to some extent in providing for the supply of our bodily wants. But if we are really and practically convinced of our real condition and character, the care of the body will be a matter of secondary interest. Conscious of our high vocation, and of our lofty

powers, we shall aspire after something infinitely higher, and give up the low cares which engross those who think only of the present, to "attend upon the Lord."

The Christian is called to enjoy the highest blessings of which his nature is capable. His Lord has ransomed him from the bondage of sin and Satan, and has purchased for him the full enjoyment of a possession fairer and better even than that which was forfeited by the fall. He is called "to attend upon the Lord:" to exercise himself in meditation and contemplation; to wait for the manifestation of the Divine will; to seek with anxiety to know that will; and to labour with zeal and promptitude to fulfil it. The word by which the Apostle marks his privilege, is not adequately rendered by our translation. It expresses the idea of "unwearied assiduity in the service of the Lord." It implies at once application and constancy. It pictures a state of mind entirely and devotedly engrossed by one object. He could hardly have chosen or formed a stronger word. We can understand what

he means to represent, because we can at once understand the reasonableness and obligation of the duty. We see that a dependent being, who derives all he enjoys, or can enjoy, from his Creator, is bound to look up to Him with unceasing hope, and to engage in His service with unwearied diligence. He can have no peculiar interest. To engage in any other employments than those prescribed him, is folly and rebellion. He can have no other happiness than what consists in waiting upon his Almighty Benefactor—to desert this is to wander from blessedness and heaven.

The chief business of the spiritual man is praise, and adoration, and prayer—the lifting up of the heart in love and gratitude. But we have in our present state peculiar duties, in the performance of which we may still attend upon the Lord. We are redeemed sinners, and our Redeemer has pointed out the way in which we may render our gratitude for the mercies which he has purchased for us. We are to love the brethren—to show forth His praise before men—to labour in His service, by

bringing those around us to the knowledge of the truth, and leading them to devote themselves to God's service. In the discharge of all the duties which we have to perform to others, we may attend upon the Lord. If in what we do, we act from a sense of duty, and under a feeling of our responsibility, we are engaged in God's service. In the most humble employments, in the most important business to which we may be called in the course of Providence, we may still be occupied in the service of our Father in heaven. We cannot be in circumstances in which we may not attend upon the Lord, in which we may not show our grateful sense of the Divine mercy.

We are not called by the word of God to abandon our lawful occupations; we are required to adorn the station "into which he has seen it fit to call us" by our Christian conduct. There is no state more dangerous than indolence. The man who has nothing to do is swept and garnished for the reception of evil. But after all, "one thing is needful." The real business of the present life is preparation for another.

We are to begin here the life we would live for ever. And if we would live worthy of the vocation with which we are called, if we would devote ourselves to the great purposes of our being, it must be the constant object of our care to avoid what may divert us from the great concern, and to "attend upon the Lord without distraction."

Suppose all present interested in the things that belong to their peace, desirous of devoting life to the ends for which it was designed—concerned for their own salvation, and the glory of God; and then what an interesting subject have we before us—how anxious must we be to gain information respecting the way in which we may "attend upon the Lord without distraction." Unhappily, we may not suppose this. The conduct of too many shows plainly enough that they are little careful to devote themselves exclusively to the service of God. Yet the subject is not less important. It may be possible to suggest a warning to many who have hitherto cared for none of these things, while we attempt to afford information to

those who seek for guidance. To none will it be in vain to gaze upon the picture of Christian prudence which must be sketched in an attempt to illustrate the duty "of attending upon the Lord without distraction."

The Gospel supposes the service of God to be the prime object of our existence. Whatever draws us off from this is, in so far as it has such an effect, dangerous and hurtful. Every thing which tends to withdraw our attention from the concerns of religion is a distraction, which we are by all means to avoid. As we are anxious to grow in grace, and in the Divine favour, we are concerned to discover what is likely to distract us from our great object, that we may be on our guard against it, and avoid it.

It is easy to suggest the most dangerous causes of spiritual distraction. In our present state, we are naturally inclined to be moved by present objects. Our present ease and comfort are considerations which affect us more than a dim and distant future, and in the task of providing for the wants of the body, we are very liable

to forget the care of the soul. It is lawful, and even praiseworthy, to labour for our subsistence, and to exert ourselves to procure what is needed for the comfort of those who are dependent upon our care. We are perfectly right in exerting ourselves to escape the miseries of poverty, and in labouring to supply our necessary wants; it was an express command of the inspired Apostle, that "if any would not work, neither should he eat." But we are not to make our duties a pretence for worldliness. In the permission which we have to supply our wants by labour, there is comprehended no permission for unlimited attention to secular business. Yet this is too frequently assumed. A very large proportion of those who are most observant of morality in their dealings with their fellowmen, appear to act upon a persuasion that there is no bound fixed beyond which they may not pursue their worldly business, except those prescribed by their physical strength and the laws of justice and honesty. They act as if they supposed that it was quite right to embrace every

opportunity of increasing their business in any way, and to any extent, in which they can secure a greater share of honest gain. And that if their strength is exhausted in their engagements, if their time is entirely occupied, and their days and nights are disquieted by anxious cares, it is rather matter of merit than of censure; they are only engaged in an attempt to provide for their families, or to place themselves in circumstances in which they may be removed from the temptations of poverty. It is very easy to decorate evil passions with splendid names, and to talk of industry, and a spirit of independence, when it would be more appropriate to mention pride and covetousness. But we are now concerned with the matter under one light only. When the heart is to such an extent as I have supposed, or to anything like such an extent, occupied with worldly business, is it possible to "attend upon the Lord without distraction?" No; other things have taken the place of the one thing needful; the heart is entirely occupied by worldly cares; no place is left for

the exercise of that filial dependence on God's providing care in which faith loves to manifest itself. We must be moderate in the attention we pay to worldly business, we must not allow it to engross so much of our thoughts, as to throw any obstacle in the way of our spiritual proficiency, if we would "attend upon the Lord without distraction."

But all are not exposed to the influence of this temptation; some are not placed in circumstances in which they are likely to run hazard from the desire of gain: they live upon settled means, which they have not perhaps the opportunity, perhaps not the desire of increasing. They have, however, the care of a family; they have the oversight of children or domestics; they have to assimilate their way of living to that adopted by others of their station, and bring up their offspring in credit and respectability. Here there are abundant materials for distracting cares. The most natural and amiable feelings of the human heart here serve to minister disquiet and embarrassment. Surely, it will whisper,

there can be nothing amiss, nothing but what is right and holy, in consulting the wishes of those who stand connected with us in the most tender relations, in entertaining anxious thoughts about the welfare of those whom it is a duty to love. It cannot be wrong to promote that order and regularity in the management of the household, without which home itself ceases to be the abode of happiness and peace. In such reasonings we are not a little tempted to yield to an influence which will lead us far away from the service of God. Unbelief, and self-dependence, and impatience, easily gain access under these fair pretences; and the very desire of domestic comfort may lead us away from the service of God. The more our families and homes engross our hearts, the less shall we be in that waiting, unembarrassed state, which is most becoming our condition as pilgrims journeying to a better country; and we cannot be too much on our guard against the influence of domestic cares, if we would "attend upon the Lord without distraction."

In our present imperfect state we stand

in need of relaxation and ease to enable us to discharge our engagements with vigour and energy; our spirits flag, and our strength gives way, before protracted exertion, and we seek relief in indulgence and indolence. Hence the desire for amusement and repose; hence the eagerness with which we naturally betake ourselves to enjoyment and pleasure. Various minds are gratified in various ways. The amusements which some enjoy with the greatest relish, others despise as mean and insipid. Some can feel the most exquisite pleasure in the study of art, and the examination of the beauties of nature; others can find gratification only in the excesses of extravagance and revel. But whatever amusements please us, whatever pleasures we enjoy, whatever we indulge in as pleasure, we should use with the most careful moderation. If we once allow the lighter employments to usurp a large share of our time and attention, they must have a distracting and enfeebling influence upon us. It matters not what may be their character, whether they be in themselves mischievous or

harmless. Let them once become so interesting as to occupy our hearts, and engross any considerable portion of our time, they must have a bad effect upon us. No one of us who is living under a due sense of our condition, can feel disposed to waste his powers on trifles. Whatever be our rank and station, some way may be found for glorifying God in a consistent plan. And we must carefully take heed that we fall not into frivolity, and a compliance with the fashions of the world, if we would "attend upon the Lord without distraction."

It is the duty of every one who has the opportunity, to embrace every occasion of cultivating the powers of the mind, that he may more worthily engage in the service of his Saviour. A taste for literature or science has preserved many an one, who might else have yielded to the world's temptations, in morality and decency, if it has not brought him to a high sense of duty. There is nothing, short of holiness, so noble and dignified as the exercise of intellect and imagination. The subject is a tempting one for declamation; and with-

out any disposition to indulge in the common-places which are now so much in fashion, we must feel that those are nobly engaged who are redeeming a portion of their time from the wasting and low cares which terminate upon the body, for the culture of the higher part of their nature. Yet letters may be abused to the soul's injury. There is no little danger in any pursuit which is likely to become engrossing. There is a fascination in literature which enables it speedily to gain an ascendancy whenever it is cordially loved. Its pursuits are so innocent, as they are called, so exciting, so far removed from the grossness of coarse vice, that the most delicate minds are not likely to be alarmed by the increase of their devotion to its objects: the greater indeed becomes their enthusiasm, the more they are disposed to be satisfied with themselves, the further they consider themselves removed from what is wrong. Yet we cannot look upon the thing as Christians, we cannot weigh it in the balance of the sanctuary, without perceiving that there is danger here, and that the

most harmless, as well as the most equivocal pursuits, at once become sinful, when they hinder our "attending upon the Lord without distraction."

The subject might be pursued much farther. I might point out the danger of ambition, and the love of being conspicuous. I might show the hazard that lurks in public business, and, indeed, all kinds of intercourse with our fellow-men. The heart readily takes up with the present; and if what we do has matter of excitement in it, if it kindles the passions, and provokes the appetite, it contains abundant seeds of mischief. It may weary us, so that we have not remaining energy to "attend upon the Lord." It may irritate us, so that we have not that self-command, without which we cannot walk worthy of our vocation. It may enfeeble us, so that we cannot endure the hardness to which we are called as soldiers of Christ Jesus. The business of the Christian's life is to "attend upon the Lord without distraction." We have all engaged "to renounce the devil, and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked

world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh: to believe all the articles of the Christian faith; and to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our lives." This is no slight engagement. It cannot be fulfilled if we neglect the means of grace, if we run into unnecessary temptation. If we are in earnest in the work of salvation, we must walk circumspectly; we must avoid every thing which would draw us off from the one great object—"To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," and to be "known of God,"—this only is of real importance. For *that* all else must be sacrificed. Yet we are not called to impossibilities; but exercising in religion the prudence we exercise in secular concerns, we may, with God's blessing, walk safely through the dangers that beset us; and with love of Christ in our hearts, and his word in our mouths, advance triumphantly forward to that blessed place where, in a sense infinitely higher than we can here, we shall "attend upon the Lord without distraction."

SERMON XIV.

CHRISTIAN FRUITFULNESS.

St. John xv. 5.

"Without me ye can do nothing."

THERE was never a title that carried with it more of significancy than that of a *Christian*. It has not, either in ancient or modern times, been very unusual to distinguish sects or parties, by denominations derived from the names of their founders; and it has generally been the boast of such sects or parties, that they faithfully retain the sentiments of the eminent persons whose name they bear. But such is the difference that obtains between different individuals, such the variety between various minds, that it is probable that

there were never two individuals who thought on all subjects exactly alike. And if we had the means of examining, there is every reason to think that the most bigotted disciples of particular schools entertain, upon many important subjects, opinions very different from those whom they profess to honour as their masters. And this they may well do without any breach of their allegiance. Their profession only engages them to receive the magisterial dogmas of their authorities; on other subjects they are left free to act upon their own knowledge or their own ignorance. They may, and they often actually do, entertain opinions which their masters held in contempt or abhorrence, without deserving to be regarded otherwise than as very faithful disciples.

And this is why I have asserted that there is something peculiarly significant in the name of a Christian. The person who bears, or at least who deserves to bear, that name, does not merely join himself to a sect, or enrol himself on the lists of a party; he does not merely profess certain tenets.

or adopt a particular set of opinions, reserving to himself all the while the liberty of judging and acting for himself on the other points. He has given himself up entirely to the service and guidance of a master. He absolutely disclaims every thing like independence. He desires to do all, whatsoever he does in word or deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus.

But the relation in which the Christian stands to the Redeemer, is not merely one of obedience, or adherence, it is an *union*. The lively faith which distinguishes him from others unites him to his Saviour. The figures by which this union is described and illustrated in the Scriptures are of the most expressive character. Christ is "the head of the Church," "which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Christians "are the body of Christ." They "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Nothing can be a more complete image of union

than that thus borrowed from the living body. The relation between Christ and his people is further compared to that which subsists between the different parts of a building. The Church is said to be "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; *in whom* all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom we also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

The beginning of the chapter from which I have taken the text, affords another very striking illustration of the same relation. Our blessed Lord speaks of himself as connected with his people, as the true vine, of which his Father is the husbandman. He thus continues the metaphor. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean, through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide

in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing;" or, rather, bear or produce nothing.

The whole of this beautiful and expressive allegory would well reward the most diligent examination. The last words will afford abundant matter for our study at this time. May we, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, examine them to our spiritual good!

I said that the words of the text might more correctly be rendered, "without me ye can bear nothing." There are several places in our version where the same word of the original is thus rendered: as in the well-known passages, "bring forth fruits meet for repentance;" and, "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit." The context clearly requires the same translation here. Our Lord is speaking of the productiveness of the branches of the true vine; he has asserted that they only can be productive when united to it. He then

explains the allegory, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same, (he, and he only) bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, (or, as the margin translates it, 'severed from me,') ye can bear nothing." Translated thus, the passage evidently means, that every thing that is good and excellent in the life of the Christian is the effect of his union with the Saviour; that, but for his connection with him, he would be utterly barren and unproductive.

It is well to contend for this rendering of the word, because it meets an objection that might be urged against our Lord's assertion, when it is rendered, "without me ye can do nothing." We undoubtedly exist but by the Divine will; we are supported every moment by an exercise of Almighty power; and, therefore, inasmuch as our Lord is "God blessed for ever," we may all, most assuredly, be said "in him to live, and move, and have our being;" and certain it is then, in this sense, "without him we can do nothing." But in the text, our Lord speaks in his mediatorial

character, as he is the Head of his Church, the Redeemer of the world; and though it is likely that it is his mediation that keeps a world of sinners from falling into ruin; that the sin-polluted creation would have been long ago consigned to destruction, but for his having assumed the character of the Saviour of sinners; yet when we consider the melancholy amount of sin that is daily and hourly committed, we must admit that there is a difficulty in understanding how it could be said, that "without him we can do nothing." Such, alas! is the corruption of our nature, that we need no aid to sin. We go astray from our birth; we add iniquity to sin, We are continually evincing our corrupt origin by fresh transgressions; and proving, that however weak we may be to good, we are strong for evil.

Keeping in memory the real meaning of the words, let us now examine our Lord's assertion, "without me ye can do nothing." Every thing of a spiritual nature in us, is the consequence of our relation to the Saviour. The sin of our first parents cut

off our race from God's favour. We are all by nature dead in trespasses and sins. The thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually, for our hearts never naturally fix on God. There has been, in individuals and communities, a constant tendency to forget God, to deprave and to extinguish that remaining feeling, the wreck of the spiritual faculties with which he was created, which leads him to feel satisfaction in the Divine favour, and to fear the Divine displeasure. Witness the progress and spread of idolatry—how disposed men have ever been to worship the creature rather than the Creator—to think God such an one as themselves. In spite of the suggestions of conscience, the heart always finds ready means of hardening itself, or of lulling itself into false comfort. It is in its natural state deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. There is nothing which can restore it to the excellence which it has forfeited; unless renewed from without, it must ever continue in its ruined state.

It was the misery of man which afforded

occasion to the mercy of God. It was because he could do nothing for himself, that the Word of God undertook his cause. He became the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: in the fulness of time he was manifested in the flesh, and suffered and died. By his life and death he purchased the forgiveness of our race; he wrought out a way by which God can be just, and yet the Justifier of the believer, and provided the means of bringing us to God. It was by his mediation that the Holy Spirit's influence was procured to change the heart, to bring it to feel its misery and its need of salvation.

Without the Saviour we can do nothing. We must ever remain engrossed by worldly objects, without hope and without God in the world. We must continue hard-hearted, and insensible to our danger; thinking only of the present, careless of the future. The awakening of conscience, the exciting of a concern for the soul's safety, is the work of the Spirit of God, whose gracious influence has been purchased by the Saviour. To this source

we must owe the commencement of the spiritual life,—without this we could do nothing.

But as the spiritual life must begin in the grace of Christ, as the soul must remain dead till the day-spring from on high has shined upon it, and enlivened it; so its continuance is entirely due to the influence from which it derives its origin. When the sinner has been made to feel the danger and misery of an unconverted state, and has come for pardon to the inexhaustible mercy of the Redeemer, he is still as dependent upon the grace of his Saviour as ever,—without him they can do nothing. His mediation alone has effected a way of pardon—his grace alone can enable them by faith to take advantage of that way of pardon. Desirous as he may be of relief from the burden of sin, anxious as he may be of recovering the Divine favour; the terms of acceptance which the Gospel proposes are such as our corrupt nature does not readily close with. They are too humbling, too revolting to our natural pride and self-suffi-

ciency, to be acceptable to the sinner. It is not till he has been led to see the vanity of every other refuge, that he is willing to come to the cross of Christ. In fact, he would never come but for the grace of Christ, which softens his heart, and brings down his pride, and leads him thankfully to accept salvation as the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As the Saviour gives grace to impart, so he gives grace to strengthen this faith. Were he not still to intercede, it must fail; but with him there is fulness of grace. All who, convinced of their sins and anxious for pardon, by a true faith receive him as their Saviour, are united to him. They become members of his body, or, as they are represented in the words in connexion with the text, branches of the true vine. They derive life and strength and vigour from him. "The life which they now live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved them, and gave himself for them." They are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." They feel and acknowledge

that "without him they can do nothing." But they at the same time feel that they can do "all things through Christ which strengtheneth them." The proofs they have already had of his power and goodness, leave them no room to doubt his ability and willingness to help them. They have trusted him for salvation, convinced of their own weakness and wretchedness: he will deliver them from the punishment of sin, and will release them from its power.

My brethren, the subject to which I have endeavoured to direct your attention, suggests several important inquiries. We have all by baptism been united to the visible church—are we really members of the body of Christ? Are we living branches of the true vine? All are not Israel who are of Israel. Our outward privileges, however great, however valuable, will not avail us, if they be unaccompanied by a new heart, a lively faith, a holy life. They will but grievously increase our condemnation. Have we been convinced by the effectual working

of the Holy Spirit, that without Christ we can do nothing? that we must derive all we need for pardon and for holiness from the love and power of the Saviour? that in him only we can have life? that in him we can be safe and happy? Would that we all might be able to answer this inquiry in the way which is so greatly to be desired! Would that we could all declare that, awakened to a sense of the evil of sin, we disclaimed every way of salvation, but that which is set before us in the Lord! My brethren, is it not dreadful to be in any other state; careless, or impenitent, or trusting to ourselves? Oh, let it not be our condition? Let not the threatenings, and invitations, and promises of the word of God be laid before us in vain. May the blessing of God accompany his Gospel! And may it not be without profit that we remember the solemn words, "without me ye can do nothing!"

SERMON XV.

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE.

PROVERBS xviii. 21.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

THE faculty of speech is one of the very highest faculties with which we have been endowed. Great is its value to man as an intelligent and social being, and great is the weight of responsibility which is implied by the possession of it. Yet it would at the first sight almost appear that the Hebrew sage has stated something extravagant, that he has exceeded the fair limit of what is allowed even to hyperbole, when he says, as he does in the text, that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Examination perhaps will show that the

expression is of highly figurative character, that the sacred writer expresses an important truth, and that the importance of what he would convey has led him to employ language that will not bear to be strictly interpreted.

This however is certainly not the case. The words are undoubtedly to be understood in their literal meaning. There is nothing that is figurative, there is nothing but what is strictly accurate in the sentence, that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

I said that there is nothing figurative in the words; and such is the case with them, as they are represented in our translation. But our translators have suppressed a very elegant and highly poetical figure. The words of Solomon are, when literally rendered, "Death and life are in the hand of the tongue." In the lofty spirit of the Hebrew poetry, he gives form, and powers, and action to the faculty of which he speaks. He represents it as a living thing —as the arbiter of good and ill, as the disposer of human fortune. Never was there

a more noble personification: never did poet more suitably furnish an embodied abstraction. The faculty of speech stands before us in giant dimensions, and terrible powers, bearing before him our race's destinies, when we read the striking words, "Death and life are in the *hand* of the tongue."

Our translators have stripped the sentiment of its figurative dress. They have conveyed it to us perfectly unadorned. But though the words may have lost something of poetical beauty, they express all the moral meaning of the inspired writer. The original words clearly mean just what our translators have represented them as meaning. When Solomon says that "death and life are in the *hand* of the tongue," he undoubtedly means that "death and life are in the *power* of the tongue;" and the sentiment he would express simply, is that what we say has an important, a most important bearing on our present and future condition. May God the Holy Spirit be with us! And may he who now addresses you be enabled to speak under an urgent

sense of his responsibility, remembering on the present, and on all similar opportunities of preaching the glorious Gospel, that "death and life are in the power of the tongue."

It is not at all necessary to make out a laboured proof of the fact, that men in general do not act upon the assertion of the text. It is quite certain and undeniable that the world at large seems to regard what *they say* as of very little consequence, and show by their conduct that they utterly forget that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." The profane and irreligious might set small value on a maxim of Scripture, the careless and worldly concern themselves not with such things; but the charge extends beyond these classes. Those who profess to feel the importance of the one thing needful—who acknowledge the Divine origin of the Bible, and the binding obligation of its morality, are slow to learn the lesson which the text teaches, and to show by their habitual conduct that they estimate as the Scripture estimates the power of the tongue.

I need no further claim upon your attention than what is furnished by the single consideration, that the statement of the text is so little regarded. I shall endeavour to make out the truth it conveys, by examining it, *first*, in its application to the present life; and *then*, in its bearing upon our spiritual condition, or in its application to the future.

As a maxim of common prudence, as a saying of consummate practical wisdom, the words of the text deserve our most serious attention. It were well for all of us, if merely with a view to our present interests, to carry even in our memory the proverb of the text, and to act on all occasions with the full persuasion that "death and life are in the power of the tongue." I would not say that every word we utter has an influence on the good or ill of others; it certainly, however, has on the good or ill of ourselves. But let us leave for a short time that view of the subject, and show in the first place the importance of what we say to our fellow-men. Now it is not too much to say that there

are some persons who never speak well of others. It is not necessary to inquire what may be its cause, we are concerned only with the fact that they can never say a word of their neighbours which does not imply censure. The Psalmist has powerfully said of such, "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips." They deal in accusation, and complaint, and suspicion, and seem only to attain their object when they can throw doubt upon the character and motives of others. And fatal often is their cruel activity. They often succeed in propagating opinions which lead to the ruin of the unfortunate objects of their malice. A Doeg belies the innocent Ahimelech, and the murderous sentence went forth from Saul which led to the slaughter of fourscore and five persons of the priestly family. Death is but too plainly in the power of such men's tongues, and ruin sits as the ready handmaid of the man who makes his words the instruments of his malevolence.

Let us reverse the picture, and see hap-

piness smiling about the man, whom God's renewing grace, and God's blessed gift of a kindly and amiable disposition, lead to speak of others in the language of justice, and gentleness, and charity. As he thinks as well as he can of others, so he speaks as well as he can of others. He does not propagate idle reports, or carry about vile slanders, much less does he speak of others with unfairness and severity. When he hears what is amiss of others, he is ever ready to meet it, by explaining what is suspicious, by putting a good construction on what is equivocal. Wherever he can, he will bear his testimony to the integrity and good character of others. As he is desirous of their welfare, he is ever anxious to contribute to promote it. Life and prosperity are in the power of this man's tongue. He has often the satisfaction of tracing the benefit of his active charity; much more that he cannot trace is known to his Father that is in heaven.

But these are extreme cases; we have looked upon what, it is to be hoped, is a picture of very unusual malevolence, and

what, it is to be feared, is a picture of very unusual charity. But our proverb does not apply merely to extremes. We will not think that there is any one among us who would use his tongue as an instrument of mischief, and we may not think that there are many among us who use it as an instrument of systematic philanthropy. And yet every one of us, in his dealings with society, has "death and life in the power of his tongue." Whatever may be his station, whatever the estimation in which he is held by those around him, his testimony is likely to have *some* value, his advice is likely to have *some* value. And when he is speaking in mere thoughtlessness, there may be those hearing him on whom his very random words may be falling as a balm or a poison. Many a one has thrown out that in pure simplicity, and little thinking that what he said would have any effect at all, which has put others upon a course which has led them to the height of prosperity, or to utter destitution. I say what you must all perceive to be quite accurate. And surely these few remarks are quite

sufficient to show, that if we set any value upon the happiness and comfort of others, it becomes us to set a watch over our mouth, and constantly to remember that "death and life are in the power of the tongue."

But what we say has a most important influence on our own condition in this world. Our condition here is greatly affected by what others think of us: "a good name," says the wise man, "is better than precious ointment;" and we know full well that it is not easy to struggle against the difficulties created by a bad character. The estimation in which we are held, is very greatly affected by our words. Men are well convinced that it is "out of the fulness of the heart that the mouth speaketh;" and it is quite true in our dealings with the world, that "by our words we are justified, and by our words we are condemned." The world is much too sagacious to think well of the babbling, prating man, or of the slanderous, evil-speaking man, or of the profane talker, or of the filthy talker; and many a one strikes a

death-blow to his own worldly prospects by a gratuitous exposure of his own folly or shame. An enemy, sometimes a powerful enemy, may be made by what would seem a trifling word; and a friend, on the contrary, may be made by an observation that might by the speaker himself be regarded as trivial and insignificant. The attention of others may often be alive to what we say, when we are little disposed to suspect it. None of us can safely venture to calculate what may be the effect of a word on our future fortunes. Joseph tells his dreams to his envious brothers; and first we see him dragged into Egypt a miserable bond-slave, and then we see him all but seated upon Egypt's throne. The more we examine the workings of society, and lay bare the springs of human action, the more we shall be convinced that, considered in its influence upon our present condition, the sentiment of Solomon is literally accurate, and that "death and life are in the power of the tongue."

But we do not part with it upon these terms. It would be but small praise of

any passage of the inspired word to say of it that it conveyed a valuable rule of human prudence, if we were to stop short there, and not go on to say that, like all Scripture, it is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." I have yet to notice its superior sense, and to show how, *in respect to the future*, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." And here, my brethren, it must be quite unnecessary to enter into detail to convince you of the fact that spiritual death is the frequent and melancholy effect of the impious efforts of some men's tongues. The Apostle has sanctified the maxim of the heathen poet, that "evil communications corrupt good manners." And when we think of the terrible ravages of infidels and heretics, who have for the most part laboured with perverse activity to circulate and perpetuate their soul-destroying errors, when we think of the horrible successes of those who have in various ages exerted themselves to relax morality, and to ruin or corrupt the faith, we have striking proof of the fact that

"death" at least "is in the power of the tongue." There are such men ever at work; Satan is never destitute of labourers. We are ourselves witnesses of the melancholy process. There are agents of ill about in the land, seeking whom they may devour, endeavouring to produce a general scepticism, and to inculcate doctrines subversive not only of morality, but of society itself. I need not call upon you to become in imagination spectators of the ruin of Korah and his company; I need not invite you to look upon the wretched Jews, incited by the persuasions of the chief priests and scribes, to reject and crucify the Lord of life and glory, and bringing down upon themselves the ruin of their place and nation. It is likely we most of us are acquainted with instances in which the efforts of evil men and deceivers have brought some we know into the snare of the devil, by leading them to make shipwreck of the faith, or to give themselves to unbridled profligacy.

But *life* too is in the power of the tongue. If there are those who speak words that

kill the soul, there are those who, by God's blessing resting upon what they say, are the happy means of awakening others to the spiritual life. The cause of God has never been without its noble band of witnesses; and since the command went forth, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," there has never failed, in the lands that have received Christianity, a succession of men, set apart by those who have authority in the Church, for the especial purpose of teaching the truth. Sometimes they may have mixed much human error with the heaven-descended doctrine, but we must remember with gratitude that they always held the head, and built upon the foundation. Sometimes their lives may have been but ill in keeping with their teaching, but the purity and preciousness of the truth cannot be impaired by the vileness of him who preaches it. When we think of the value of the Gospel, when we reflect on what it does for man, that it proclaims a doctrine which, if received by faith, saves the sinner from the curse of the law and the power

of sin, and enables him to live in the love of God and man, and in the blessed hope of everlasting life; when we think that the conversion of the sinner is often, very often, effected by the means of preaching, and that preaching, and other verbal instruction, may be regarded as the chief means of edification and comfort to the Church,—we must see a striking correctness in the assertion of the proverb, that life, yea, eternal "life, is in the power of the tongue."

But here too we must descend from particular instances, and not allow ourselves to suppose for a moment that though the sentiment of the text may apply with an accuracy that cannot be doubted to the miserable efforts of the sophist, and to the sacred labours of the minister of the Gospel, yet it cannot, with any thing like equal accuracy, be applied to all. It does, strictly and literally, in this sense apply to all. Every one of us, from the highest to the lowest, has spiritual "death and life in the power of his tongue." Every word he speaks, we do not say *has* an effect upon

those who hear him, but possibly *may have* an effect upon those who hear him; it may tend to awaken the sinner to a sense of his danger, or may harden him in his impenitence. It may be to the believer a word of edification, or it may bring him into grievous temptation. If there are any of us who make a profession of the faith, speak in levity, or say aught that may be chargeable with inconsistency, it is pretty sure to throw difficulties in the way of the unconverted, and to afford scandal to the real Christian. But if, on the contrary, our communications be such as become the Gospel, and we speak under our habitual sense of our obligations, as those who are bought with a price, and therefore bound to glorify God, often, when we least expect it, we may say that which may be employed by the Holy Spirit in the work of conversion, or be made effectual to the admonition or the consolation of the people of God.

Important, however, as may be the effects of what we say on others, they cannot be greater than they are upon ourselves. In

this sense, truly "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." A word may determine our condition for ever, and mark us as the children of God, or the children of Satan. By a rash word, we may bind ourselves down to eternal ruin. We may, for instance, by a word, cast in our lot with the evil-doers, or forfeit our allegiance to the King of heaven. By a word, again, we may express our adherence to the cause of truth, and bring ourselves within the influence of that society and that teaching, that may be blessed to our eternal advantage. Oh, we do not speak in vain. "With the tongue," says the Apostle, "bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." But prayers, and praises, and holy conversation, cannot be in vain—nor can curses, and railings, and idle talk, be in vain. It is true that the man who uses the language of piety, may be a base hypocrite; but if the work of grace has been begun in us, if the love of Christ does constrain us, there is nothing then can be regarded as so sure a pledge of our spiritual

progress, as our employing our tongues to the glory of God. There can be no mistake about the man who speaks profanely—"Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh." If the language of the world is in the mouth, the love of the world is in the heart. And the more the sinner speaks as his sins incline him to speak, the more he rivets himself to his sins. By unusual provocations, we may expect to quench the Spirit, or to bring down on ourselves a judgment. We have but to look upon a Moses, excluded from the privilege of entering Canaan, because he spake unadvisedly with his lips, and a Peter distinguished by a promise for a timely confession of his faith in the Saviour, to perceive the correctness of the statement that "death and life are in the power of the tongue."

My brethren, it is to be feared we may find much that is greatly amiss in ourselves, when we press our consciences with the question, Have we acted as those who believed that death and life are in the power of the tongue? The Lord himself says unto us, that "Every idle word that

men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." And yet, how much do most of us say in thoughtlessness, how very much without the slightest view to edification! May the thought of this humble us! May it tend to convince us more strongly than ever of our weakness and sinfulness, and lead us to feel more strongly our need of an Almighty Saviour, and a Divine Sanctifier! The Saviour is preached to us as a propitiation for sin—but he is also preached to us as a Deliverer from sin; and none of us can have duly felt his mighty power to renew us by his Spirit unto holiness, till he has been brought to feel the importance of his communications, and to remember that "death and life are in the power of the tongue."

SERMON XVI.

THE HOLY COMMUNION.

1 CORINTHIANS xi. 23—26.

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

IN these words St. Paul describes the institution of the Holy Communion. Our Lord himself, he tells us, had given him this account of it. It agrees exactly with the account which is given by the first three

evangelists. The great importance of this Divine institution, rendered it necessary that great care should be taken in perpetuating the record of it. Four separate writers accordingly have been employed to hand it down to us. The language which our Lord employed, and the nature of the sacrament, are so wonderful, that it was well we should have every possible warrant for the view which the Church entertained of them, that we might not have to suspect that we were receiving any human invention for an ordinance of our Lord and Saviour.

The words of the inspired writers, in the several passages in which they describe the institution of the Lord's Supper, are but few. They only just mention what took place on that solemn occasion. They only relate the impressive words in which the blessed Jesus instituted the sacred feast which forms the most solemn rite of his religion. Revelation never attempts to explain to us mysteries which we could not comprehend. Faith could not be exercised if the Gospel set before us only

what was within the grasp of our reason. Especial care has been taken that we should know what our Lord actually said—no attempt is made to explain it. We may learn much from this. Our business with this, as with all the other mysterious parts of the Gospel, is to believe and learn, and to guard against curiosity and a spirit of speculation. It is no doubt perfectly natural for us to desire to understand every thing. The gift of reason was given us that we might understand every thing that is comprehensible. And while we have a right to suppose that a thing is comprehensible, we may lawfully exercise our minds in efforts to understand it. When it is confirmedly and obviously beyond our grasp, such efforts are all in vain. They are worse—they lead to positive and pernicious error.

Never was the danger of attempting to explain mysteries more strikingly exemplified than in the case before us. For many centuries, the Church was content to receive the words of our Lord in their obvious meaning, and while she employed the

visible elements of bread and wine in conformity with the Divine institution, believed that the body and blood of Christ were verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper. In subsequent times, two dangerous errors, most opposite to each other, but proceeding from the same fatal desire of making plain to the human understanding what God had left mysterious, have very widely prevailed in the Christian world. In the latter part of the ninth century, when society was in a state to be least shocked by anything extravagant and wonderful, and when superstition was but too likely to pass for devotion, the opinion began to gain ground that the bread and wine in the Holy Eucharist were, by the pronouncing of our Lord's words by the priest, actually changed into the substance of the body and blood of our Saviour. And this monstrous opinion, only tolerable as having probably proceeded from an excessive reverence for this blessed Sacrament, at length was recognised as the general opinion in the Church. But though it would at first sight seem

that this view is the most honourable to our Lord's institution, it is in fact only one of the many instances which show the impatience with which the human mind bears what it cannot understand. It is a desperate effort to get rid of a difficulty, though, as usually happens, it introduces another difficulty. Like all such self-willed attempts, it led to the most deplorable consequences. Not only did it tend to bring in upon the Church the most lamentable superstitions and corruptions, but it brought the very idea of faith into peril. It confused the whole subject of evidence; and as the subject came to be examined in times when the public mind was in a state of activity, it was found impossible to support it, but by the aid of a subtle philosophy, which, if carried out, must lead to universal scepticism.

At the period of the Reformation, when the minds of men, breaking off from old opinions, in too many instances, while they renounced corruptions and errors, lost sight of important truths, a very large portion of those who abandoned the doctrine of

Transubstantiation, substituted for it a most erroneous and defective view of the Lord's Supper. Alarmed at the mischiefs and abuses which had proceeded from the Romish doctrine, they adopted an exactly opposite view of the whole subject. They contended that our Lord's words were to be understood merely in a figurative sense. That the Eucharist is only a memorial of his death. That he is present in it, only as he is present whenever he operates by his grace. And that, in point of fact, there is nothing peculiarly mysterious in this blessed Sacrament.

The Church of England protests against both these errors. In her twenty-eighth Article she says, "The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ."

After having said, in her twenty-fifth Article, that "Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him;"—

She teaches her youthful members, in the Catechism, that "the body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper;" and she invites us to pray to the Father of mercies, when we kneel before the holy table, that we may "so eat the flesh of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, and drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us." She rejects Transubstantiation, as it "cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many

superstitions; but at the same time she maintains our Lord's real presence in the Eucharist, as it was believed in the best ages of the Church. She enters into no explanation of this great mystery, she lays down no scholastic definitions, but leaves it in the simplicity in which it is brought before us in Scripture. As her obedient children, it is our business to cultivate in ourselves the same modest and docile spirit, not to stumble at apparent difficulties, or give way to a love of system or theory, but to be ready to receive every part of Divine truth.

On such a subject it is not easy to speak without great danger; it is presumptuous to advance any private opinions; it is scarcely reverential to bring it forward to an indiscriminate assembly at all. The spirit must be disciplined, before the mind can receive any benefit from the contemplation of the high things of the Gospel. I am far from wishing to invite any who are defiled with unrepented sins, or who are sunk in worldliness or pleasure, to direct an unhallowed gaze towards such an object. Let them repent, and do the first works,

and thus come in faith to this sacred feast. I have a particular object in bringing forward the subject this morning. I cannot remain silent under the state of things which prevails among us; and I wish to speak what I feel on a most important topic. I have long observed with pain the smallness of the number of our communicants. Very many of those among us who appear most regularly at church, never approach the altar. Week after week they come to this house, and seem to take an interest in its services, yet habitually turn away from the Holy Communion. As very many of whom this may be said are not only in the habit of frequenting the house of God, but lead a Christian life, and are, as it may be hoped, under the influence of Christian principles, the melancholy fact of which I speak probably proceeds from some mistake which it is my duty to endeavour to remove. With all plainness of speech I shall make the attempt this morning.

It is to be feared that very great ignorance very extensively prevails with respect

to the duty of partaking of the holy communion. Many appear to think that though advanced Christians should partake of it, it may safely be neglected by such as are not conscious of high attainments in holiness. They are not at all aware that it is one of those means of grace by which alone they can ever become advanced Christians, and not only so, but that without partaking of it they can scarcely be called Christians at all. In the infancy of the Church it appears to have been constantly celebrated in the Christian assemblies. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer." (Acts ii. 42.) At all events it was regarded as the chief object of their meeting: "On the first day of the week, the disciples came together to break bread." (Acts xx. 7.) And when the Apostles had finished their course, and the Church was committed to the care of ordinary pastors, it was still looked upon in the same light. It was considered a positive offence not to partake of the Lord's Supper. In the Apostolical

canons, as they are called, the code by which the Church was governed in the second and third centuries, it is declared that "All such of the faithful as come to the Church, and hear the Scriptures read, but stay not the prayers, and to partake of the Holy Communion, ought to be suspended as authors of disorder in the Church." (Can. 10.) And the council of Antioch, in the fourth century, enacted, that "All such as come into the Church of God, and hear the Holy Scriptures read, but do not communicate with the people in prayer, and refuse to partake of the Eucharist, which is a disorderly practice, ought to be cast out of the Church, till they confess their fault, and bring forth fruits of repentance; when if they ask pardon they may obtain it." (Conc. Antioch. can. ii.) Thus careful was the Ancient Church, that her children should enjoy the blessings of this blessed Sacrament. In those ages, exclusion from it was deemed the heaviest punishment which could be inflicted on the sinner. For, anxious as the Church was that Christians should

enjoy all the privileges of their calling, she would not have them come to the table of the Lord, while they were in a state of unrepented sin; and therefore carefully excluded them from it, when they had by their conduct shown themselves unworthy. She encouraged all to exercise the duty of self-examination, and those who had openly transgressed, she obliged to perform public penance before they were restored to communion. The Church of England has been long deprived by unfortunate circumstances of the power of exercising a like godly discipline—a circumstance which, in the Communion Service of Ash-Wednesday, she annually deplores. But in as far as she has influence upon the consciences of her faithful children, she follows the example of the Primitive Church. She requires by her Canons, "that in every Parish-Church and Chapel, where Sacraments are to be administered within this realm, the Holy Communion shall be ministered . . . . so often, and at such times, as every parishioner may communicate at the least thrice in the year." (Can. xxi.) And she even

goes so far as to require that "the Minister, Church-wardens, Quest-men, and Assistants of every Parish-church, and Chapel, shall yearly, within forty days after Easter, exhibit to the bishop or his chancellor, the names and surnames of all the parishioners, as well men as women, which being of the age of sixteen years, received not the Communion at the Easter before." Though she has never been enabled by the civil power fully to put these laws into execution, they sufficiently show her intentions and wishes. At the same time, however, she is equally careful to admonish her members not to partake of the Communion lightly. She cannot enforce the primitive discipline; but she most solemnly warns all "diligently to try and examine themselves before they presume to eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup," and brings before them the great "danger of receiving the same unworthily."

The importance of receiving the Holy Communion, as it is shewn by the practice of the Primitive Christians, and the laws and formularies of the present Church, is

evident. The nature of the Sacrament makes it quite certain that it ought to be received by all. "As often as we eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, we do show the Lord's death till he come." Our Lord himself commanded, "This do in remembrance of me." As we would keep up in our minds, therefore, a remembrance of the great sacrifice made for us on the cross, as we would obey a distinct command of the Saviour, we may not be absent from this sacred feast. The branch can live and bear fruit only as it is united to the vine—*we* can live only as we are united to Christ—and we know no other way in which we come into this blessed union as we do in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is to deprive ourselves of our most valuable privilege, and lose the most precious of the means of grace, to neglect it.

When we remember how it was prized by the Christians of former times, how frequently they received it, and what penances they submitted to endure that they might be restored to the enjoyment of it, if they had been so unhappy as to have forfeited

the privilege of communion, it may well surprise us that so many now gratuitously neglect it. When we read the plain words of Scripture, and observe the practice of the first believers, and call to mind the enactments of the Church, it must not only astonish, but deeply pain every reflecting person, to know that so many habitually neglect so plain a duty. What is the cause of it? I would not make the case too general, but would confine it in the present occasion to ourselves. What is the cause that leads so many of you, my brethren, to neglect it? Your coming to Church, and acknowledging the restraints of the law of Christ, must be regarded as proof that you are not indifferent to the care of your souls—why then not enjoy the blessings of religion? why deny yourselves the use of the most effectual means of grace? Indecision in such a matter as religion is preposterous. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

If there are any who are conscious of

living in unrepented sin, if they are intemperate, or unclean, or dishonest, they may not come indeed safely. Such persons would "be guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour, would eat and drink their own damnation, not considering the Lord's body." Their business is to repent and amend their lives, and to seek pardon. And, oh, let them not delay repentance! Awful indeed is it to frequent the Church, and habitually hear the word of God in impenitence and hypocrisy. Do they not fear to live on in a state in which they fear to receive the Lord's Supper?

The case of such persons, however, is clear. I may only exhort them to repentance. But I trust that there are very many among you who are not deterred by such motives from coming to the Lord's Table. You are deterred perhaps by scruples about your fitness to come; you cannot think yourselves worthy; you are conscious that you do not take a decided part; that you are too much occupied by worldly cares; that you do not entirely abstain from doubtful amusements; that you do

not feel that you have devoted yourselves to God. But why remain in this state? why condemn yourselves still to the certain misery of a state in which your conscience cannot be at peace? Why not seek that assistance, without which you can never be what you know you must be, before you can be in a state of safety? If your consciences are sufficiently alive to make you conscious of your danger, why should they not bring you to seek relief? While you are worldly and undecided, you are in a dangerous condition. You must look upon heaven as your home; you must choose the one thing needful, which cannot be taken from you before you can be safe. The love of Christ must constrain you to a life of holiness. Why not choose this part at once? Choose it, and then come for grace to confirm you in your resolution to the Lord's Table. You feel the weaknesses and pollutions of your soul—come to the Saviour who offers to strengthen, to cleanse, and to feed you.

We may suppose that there are others again who are endeavouring to live to God,

and to obtain salvation, who yet fear to come to the holy communion. They believe in the Lamb of God as their Saviour, they look upon sin as exceeding sinful, they would desire to live in righteousness and true holiness, but they feel themselves to be miserable sinners: that in every act of faith and obedience there is a mixture of something sinful. Their faith is weak; they are continually giving way to temptation. They would wish to be holy—there is nothing they would wish more; but, alas! for what they are! Have such as they the marriage-garment, required by God in holy Scripture? Can they be received as worthy partakers of that holy table? Yes: they are in a condition to receive its blessings. However small their faith, they may come if they love the Lord, and are striving to live to him. Such as they are expressly bidden to this heavenly feast. What they fearfully regard as their unworthiness, is the very condition which renders them objects of the Lord's compassion. We have been made his children. If we have strayed from his house, he is always willing to

receive us back, if we will return. He sees us afar off; he despises not the day of small things.

And if there are any of you who feel such scruples, why take counsel only with your own doubts and fears, and not come for advice to those who are set over you in the Lord? It is a false delicacy which prevents your laying open the state of your conscience to those whose duty it is to direct you in spiritual concerns. The Church says, "If there be any who cannot quiet his conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to his minister, that by the ministry of God's holy word, he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." Most willingly will I render my aid in carrying out her maternal intentions. I might feel reluctant to tender my counsel if I spoke in my own name, but it is my duty to magnify my office. I seek not to avoid any responsibility; I hope I am ready to bear cheerfully any pains in my

Master's work; in His name, and as His minister, I affectionately and urgently invite you to consult me privately if you are still unconvinced of the propriety of presenting yourselves at the Lord's table. I have introduced the subject to you some weeks before the Lord's Supper will be administered in this Church again; let me entreat you in the meantime to give your attention to the subject. I shall now add but a few words from the exhortation which the Church requires to be read under such circumstances: "As the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up his soul by death upon the cross for your salvation, so it is your duty to receive the communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of His death, as He himself hath commanded: which if ye shall neglect to do, consider with yourselves how great injury ye do unto God, and how sore punishment hangeth over your heads for the same, when ye wilfully abstain from the Lord's table, and separate from your brethren, who come to feed on the banquet of that most heavenly food."

SERMON XVII.

AHAB AND MICAIAH.

1 KINGS xxii. 8.

"And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so."

FOR nearly a century after their separation, the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were engaged in frequent hostilities. A spirit of seditious discontent on the one side, and of wanton tyranny on the other, had tended to rend the ten tribes from the dominion of the house of David. The political separation had been aggravated by important religious differences. Judah,

which remained its allegiance, maintained its profession of the national faith, and continued to observe its divinely-appointed worship. Israel, by the impious policy of Jeroboam, was led into idolatry and schism. And while the one side rightly held that all ought to worship at Jerusalem, and the other bowed down before the calves which their guilty leader had set up at Dan and at Bethel, they were both likely to forget that they were descended from a common ancestry, that they spoke a common language, and that they both professed to live under institutions which had been dictated to Moses by the voice of God. The increase of the power of the neighbouring kingdom of Syria seems to have induced the rival monarchs to suspend a domestic warfare, and unite their forces against a foreign enemy—"Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel." There had been enough of bloodshed. It would have well become the character of Jehoshaphat, if from motives of religion and humanity he had desired to put a stop to the unnatural contest. But it seems to have been alto-

gether conducted in a spirit of godless policy. He not only made peace with the king of Israel, but entered into an alliance with him; and at the time when, more than at any other, he should have avoided intimate intercourse, he formed a near connexion with the reigning family by marrying his son, Jehoram, to the daughter of the wicked Ahab. The displeasure of Jehovah was plainly manifested against this unholy union. The last days of Jehoshaphat were marked by calamity: Jehoram, led away by the advice of his wife, Athaliah, "did evil in the sight of the Lord;" and misfortune and murder tracked the progress of the family, till the infant Joash was the only male representative of the house of David.

It would appear, from a careful examination of the history, that the alliance between the kings of Judah and Israel had been formed some years before the occurrence of the events which are related in the chapter from which I have taken the text. The sacred writer tells us that there were "three years without war between

Syria and Israel." The Syrians, who had grown into importance from the discord of their neighbours, were probably awed into peace by their union. But "it came to pass, that in the third year, that Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, came down to the king of Israel." He found his ally preparing for an attack on Syria, and was invited to join in the expedition. After having gone so far as he had gone in his acquaintance with this dangerous friend, it was not to be expected that he would now refuse his countenance and assistance. We have no right to enter into intimate acquaintance with the wicked; if we do, it is not at all surprising that we should in the end be found engaged with them in transactions which we should at first have regarded with horror. When requested to go to battle to Ramoth-gilead, "Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses."

The two kings are thus embarked on a Syrian war. It is likely it was an unjust, for it seems to have been an offensive

war. With one of these it was clearly unjust; Jehoshaphat had nothing to do with it. The Syrians were not his enemies; he engaged in it merely to gratify his ally. It is thus men go on from one sin to another. His first sin was forming an alliance with Ahab at all; but he does not end with that. He allows his son to intermarry into that impious family; and now we see him, and all in the natural course of things, aiding the schemes of the wretched Ahab. A severe rebuke awaited him when he returned from this war, disgraced and defeated—"Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer, went out to meet him, and said, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

But sinful as was the conduct of Jehoshaphat in making common cause with schismatic Israel and idolatrous Ahab, it is recorded to his honour that he was not even in such society ashamed of religion. He was, alas! able to stifle the scruples that must have arisen within him with

regard to the lawfulness of his uniting with his sinful neighbours, but he could not but hear the voice of conscience requiring him to begin what he was about to do with the formalities of religion. He "said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day." Ahab indulged, what he doubtless regarded as the decent prejudices of his friend; and a flattering tribe of four hundred prophets deceived him to his ruin, by bidding him "go up," and assuring him that the Lord would deliver Ramoth-Gilead into the hand of the king. Jehoshaphat was not satisfied with these assurances. More accustomed to the wholesome voice of truth, he regarded with suspicion the courtly acquiescence of these men, and "said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat

said, Let not the king say so." Ahab, doubtless, was quite correct in what he said of Micaiah. The holy man, we may well suppose, did prophesy concerning him only evil. The calamities and doom of the wretched prince had been revealed to him, and it was not for him to go beyond the word of the Lord. The king therefore *hated* him; as he hated his message, he soon came to hate his person. He treated him with habitual contempt, and, as we find from the sequel of the narrative, on the present occasion with tyrannical cruelty.

But we need not go for instruction to the sequel of the history. We need not trace the ruin of Ahab, and the imminent danger of Jehoshaphat. The words of the text contain enough of instruction. May the Holy Spirit fix in our hearts the encouragement and the warning they are calculated to convey!

The practical application, which it becomes us to make of the words of the text, is so plain, that it needs no laboured introduction. Ahab admits that there was yet one man by whom he might inquire of

the Lord; but adds, as the reason of his reluctance to consult him, "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." We all recognise the principle that influenced the mind of Ahab; it is likely we have all more or less *felt* its influence; let us trace its prevalence, that we may perceive the full extent of the danger.

There are some, who in the business of common life, form schemes so visionary and imprudent, that no one of sound sense and strict honesty can possibly sanction them. They are generally pretty well satisfied of their powers, and are much too well convinced of the justness of their opinions, and the reasonableness of their plans, to think well of the person who doubts the one, or questions the other. Whenever they take the advice of a judicious and candid person, however, they are sure to hear something that shocks their arrogant confidence. Their more prudent friend cannot think as they think. When they see nothing but hope and certainty, he sees uncertainty and doubt. When

they would act with precipitation, he would act with caution. There is no sympathy between them. For though they ask advice, they do not want advice. They have already made up their minds; what they want is encouragement. They want those whom they respect to agree with them. If, on the contrary, they differ from them, and are honest enough to avow their dissent, the respect with which they were regarded is turned to contempt, and the esteem to hatred—with Ahab, they hate their adviser, because he prophesies not good concerning them, but evil.

This is a case in which our unwillingness to be thwarted appears most clearly. But it is a common case. It was a proverb among the ancients that *truth produces foes*. We cannot, however superficially, examine society as it exists around us, without perceiving the agency of the principle that actuated the mind of Ahab. Men will not, even in trifles, submit to be contradicted. If you would have a good name in the world, you must not venture to say what you think of the vices and

follies of those around you. If you are consulted by another, if you are disposed to pass through life easily, you must not give him your candid opinion, but find out what are his own views, and then make a point of falling in with his wishes. The satirist may ridicule all this. The Christian will mourn over it. He will grieve when he thinks of the pride and self-will that lead to it. He will grieve when he looks upon the disingenuousness, and insincerity, and hypocrisy, that disfigure the fabric of society. He will see a melancholy evidence of the ruined state of our human nature, in the morbid irritability which men evince when brought under the searching influence of truth.

The principle of which we speak is in operation all around us; but it is in nothing more active than in what concerns the spiritual condition of man. The world has ever hated, as it ever will hate, men of piety. Their faith and practice reprove the world. And they are obliged, by their allegiance to the King of heaven, to bear their testimony against the world. As they pro-

phesy no good concerning it, but evil, it is not to be marvelled at that the world hates them. We all know that this is the common feeling against persons that will not keep terms with sin. They are regarded as enemies of the sinner, because they are the enemies of his sin, and the sinner is pretty sure to pay them back a bitter hostility. Hence the slanders and insinuations that are directed against the Christian—hence the frequent charge of hypocrisy, and the invidious apology of weakness. All comes from the world's hatred of godliness. And the world's hatred of godliness comes from the pride of our depraved hearts, that will not away with contradiction or opposition: "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

In whatever station he may be placed, the Christian must not expect the world's favour. He is warned by his Saviour to marvel not if the world hate him. Still a private Christian may often serve God in his generation, without exposing himself to any very marked dislike. It may happen

that he may be chiefly known to those around him, for those parts of his renewed character, that none can see brought out into action without admiring. He may be known as one who, like his Master, goes about doing good. He may be known as active in benevolence, as gentle and modest in deportment, as humble and peaceable. He may never be called upon to denounce sin, to warn, to threaten. And consequently, he may feel little of the world's hatred of the truth. But let him be made prominent in any way—put him in an office in which he is obliged conspicuously, by word or work, to bear his testimony against the world's vanities, and carelessness, and unbelief; and it will not be long before he will hear said of him, in shouts or whispers, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

Most of all, perhaps, must the ministers of the Gospel expect this. They are appointed "to preach the word; to be instant in season, out of season; to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine." And they cannot perform their

duty without exposing themselves to the world's hatred. They have to set forth truths from which the heart of man recoils in abhorrence. They have to preach the Scriptural doctrine, that man is a fallen being; to tell every particular man that he has sinned, and come short of the glory of God. They have to tell the impenitent sinner, that if he dies in his sins, he must die for ever; and to remind the self-righteous, that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified. They have to say to all, that nothing unholy or unclean can enter heaven—that until the heart is renewed, and every thought brought into captivity to the Gospel of Christ, it is in subjection to the power of Satan. They have to proclaim the great truth, that there is but one name under heaven given among men, by which they can be saved; and to call upon every one who hears them to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called. Their life must correspond with their teaching. "In all things they must shew themselves patterns of good works." They must be "examples of the believers,

in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." If they faithfully fulfil these duties, they are little likely to escape the hatred of the world. The most contradictory charges are continually preferred against them. The self-righteous person, who is trusting to his own doings and good intentions, will accuse them of decrying holiness, because they insist on dependence on the merits of the Saviour. The careless person who thinks, if he thinks at all, that the Gospel has relaxed the strictness of the Divine law, will charge them with unnecessary severity. The cry will be—or, at all events, the feeling will be—"I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." The truth—the melancholy truth is, that numbers attend our churches who cannot bear reproof. They like well enough the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, which will gratify the ear; but there must be no attack upon their sins, no wrestling with their prejudices, no breaking down their false hopes. That minister of the Gospel may well suspect himself of unfaithfulness, who does not

find that he speaks too plainly to please the prejudiced, and too boldly to please the worldly.

The fact is certain—we are all quite aware of it. What do we learn from it? We learn the necessity of keeping watch over ourselves, and of begging Divine assistance to keep us from this dangerous feeling. They are generally our best friends who prophesy not good concerning us. Those who care not for us, rarely give themselves the trouble to reprove us. It is generally a proof of great weakness to cherish feelings of dislike towards those who may feel it their duty to oppose us, and there is certainly no feeling more becoming the lover of truth, than the impartiality which influenced the mind of Jehoshaphat, when he replied to the remark of Ahab, "Let not the king say so."

But candour and fairness are not to be expected from the mass of men. We are quite sure that while the generality remain, as they are now, unaffected by a sense of the great realities of religion, the man of consistent piety must, like Micaiah, meet with

the world's hatred. He is not, therefore, to account the opposition and contempt he meets with as anything extraordinary—he is not to regard it as a strange thing. "If he is reproached for the name of Christ, happy is he." The world can never understand his motives and principles. We must expect to be ridiculed, and despised, and misrepresented. But if he is called to suffer, let him "suffer as a Christian." Let him take good heed against giving occasion to those who without cause are his enemies. He may find grace sufficient for him in every trial from his Saviour. Who is he that can harm him, if he is a follower of that which is good? The world cannot injure those who rest on God, though all ought to be prepared to expect, that it will hate and revile those who prophesy not good concerning it, but evil.

SERMON XVIII.

THE MARK OF MERCY.

EZEKIEL ix. 4, 5.

"And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity."

IN the eighth, and three following chapters of his prophecy, Ezekiel relates the particulars of an emblematical vision. As he "sat in his house, the elders of Judah sat before him" for instruction, and the hand of the Lord God fell there upon him, to

supply him with matter of warning to his companions in exile. He "beheld, and lo, a likeness as the appearance of fire," bright and glorious, who "put forth the form of an hand, and took him by a lock of his head; and the spirit lifted him up between the earth and the heaven, and brought him in the visions of God to Jerusalem." The idolatry of Judah was represented before him. One scene of their abominations after another was exhibited before his eyes. At the command of his celestial conductor, "he lifted up his eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar, the image of jealousy in the entry." Thus, as it has been finely observed, "idolatry is itself personified and made an idol, and the image sublimely called the image of jealousy." This was the general introduction to the spectacle. An opening is made in a secret chamber, and seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel are seen engaged in the celebration of what would seem to be Egyptian mysteries. He is commanded to turn again. He is brought to the door of the gate of the Lord's

house, which was toward the north, to witness the performance of Syrian rites. "Behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz." And when at last he was introduced into the inner court of the Lord's house—"behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east," imitating the superstitions of their Eastern neighbours. Thus it appears from what was thus represented to the prophet, that the Jews of the period were practising every kind of false religion which prevailed around them, while they neglected the worship of Jehovah.

Thus did the prophet see the representation of the wickedness of Judah. He was next to see his punishment. His conductor cried also in his ears with a loud voice, saying, "Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And behold, six men came from

the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter-weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's ink-horn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's ink-horn by his side; and the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. And he said unto them,

Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city."

Such was the fate of the idolaters of Jerusalem. What the Prophet saw emblematically represented in this vision was fulfilled. While he was thus allowed to look into the future, the events were fast occurring which effected the fulfilment of the threatened judgments. And it was not long before the Chaldean drew the sword, and kindled the fire, to execute against the guilty Jews the sentence of Jehovah.

I have not chosen the subject I have introduced to you, merely with a view to point out the instruction we may derive from meditating upon the catastrophe of idolatrous Judah. I wish to invite you, my brethren, to see this vision. We need not go to Jerusalem—we need not go, even in imagination, from this house. What Ezekiel saw, is represented around us, and among us, and within us. May God grant that we may lay it to heart; that we, according to our respective conditions, may be warned and comforted!

It would be instructive to us, to trace among ourselves the sins that correspond with the various kinds of idolatry with which the Jews provoked the Lord's anger: it would require little ingenuity to point to different ways in which we imitate their various abominations. In love of the world we might recognise the "image of jealousy;" and it would not be difficult to find a parallel for the ancients in the secret chamber, or the women weeping for Tammuz, or the men who with their faces toward the east worshipped the sun, in some one or other of our secret or open sins. But the text invites our attention less to the crime than to its punishment. It is unnecessary to illustrate what is evident. We are quite sure that amidst all our privileges, the great majority of us are wholly given to idolatry. We need not, alas! a heavenly conductor to show us that there are those of all ranks, and all conditions, and all ages, who worship the creature instead of the Creator. We are obliged to acknowledge that there are multitudes who neglect and despise the privi-

leges of the new covenant, as there were those who neglected and despised those of the old covenant. And what is the consequence? Why, the same process is going on. The man with the writer's ink-horn, is traversing the length and breadth of the land. A selection is being made between those who join in the prevailing idolatries, and those who "sigh and cry" for such abominations. And the men with the slaughter weapons in their hands, are ever ready to inflict on the obstinate transgressors the merited punishment.

The process is represented in the text in an emblematic manner. The judgment of God upon sinners is a terrible slaughter effected by the agency of appointed ministers; and the persons who are intended to be saved in the general massacre, are first distinguished by a mark set upon their foreheads. Thus God condescends to illustrate his manner of dealing with us. The judgments are a sword—his distinguishing mercy is the mark set upon those who are to be excepted in the impending ruin. Let us examine the transaction, and en-

deavour to discover the moral process which is exhibited by these striking figures.

We see in the state of Jerusalem, idolatrous Jerusalem, a picture of the great mass of society—the world. The Jews were, by inheritance, the people of God. They enjoyed, at the period in which Ezekiel lived, exclusively the privileges of the Church. They were by a visible sign introduced into a participation of the highest blessings which God dispensed. They were all brought into covenant with God. And this is our state. We too are in baptism made members of Christ, heirs of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. The great difference is, that ours is a higher calling; our privileges are more substantial, our knowledge clearer, our hopes brighter. But the cases are parallel. In the circumstances of the Jews then, and of ourselves now, we do but see different scenes in the same history; different passages of the history of the Church. The Jews, with all their privileges, neglected God, and fell into idolatry. We look around us, and witness the same fact.

The rich privileges of the Gospel are despised; the baptismal vow is broken, and the name of Christian is all that most retain of their interest in the Church.

We will not presume to limit God's mercy. When our Lord was asked whether there were few who are saved, he gave no answer to the question. Neither will we venture to compare one period with another, and accuse the age in which we live, as being one of unusual sinfulness. But we may assume two points without any danger of presumption. There are many now who defile themselves with idolatry, with infidelity, and excesses. And it is an undeniable fact, that the sinfulness of our age is of a very aggravated character. We cannot think of the amount of profligacy and bad principles that exist around us, without feeling that the words of the text might well now have been first uttered: "Go ye through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity."

That command is uttered. The sentence against sin is always in force. Men

cannot corrupt themselves with impunity. We see in the emblematic picture of Ezekiel's vision, what is always going on in God's government of the world. The ministers of punishment are ever abroad. They approach the sinner in different forms. There is no calculating when they may make their terrible visit. They may come to cut him down by sickness, perhaps, after a long career of evil. They may come to stop him short by a sudden stroke in the midst of his course of sin, and hurl him young and active into perdition. Or they may come to bid him sin on with a hardened conscience, daily increasing his guilt and condemnation. In some form or other they are ever at hand. Every sin brings them nearer, inviting them, as it were, to carry God's sentence into execution.

When, under the old covenant, a visible interposition of God swept off a whole generation of transgressors, and ridded a land, which they had defiled, of its guilty inhabitants, there was a plain declaration of the Divine anger against sin, and a

striking commentary of such passages of Scripture as that now before us. We do not witness such judgments; we do not in the same way see sin immediately visited with temporal chastisement. But is God's anger against sin less evident? Can we not read in the constitution of things precisely the same lesson as that which was taught by those judgments? When a life of intemperance leads to disease and misery, and the neglect of talents is visited by misfortune and distress, is it not folly to talk about these being the *natural* consequences of ill conduct, and to forget who it is that made them the consequences of such conduct at all? The sickness and weakness that prey upon the profligate, and the spiritual ignorance that reigns over the man whose heart and thoughts are set wholly on the world, and the pangs of conscience that disturb the prosperous sinner, are as much the ministers of the Divine vengeance, as were the men with the slaughter weapons in their hands in the prophet's vision. They differ but in this; that they give not the final stroke. Death

is the last messenger. This stroke introduces to eternity.

In the time when the sin is most prevalent, the punishment is not universal. When the ministers of punishment receive their commission, another commission is given too. The amount of human wickedness might well justify a complete destruction; a corrupt nature is man's birthright; and there is not a single individual of the race who does not accumulate upon himself an amount of guilt extensive enough to pollute a world. But there is a difference among men; a difference produced by Divine grace. Though all are fallen, though all are guilty and sinful, all are not in the same state; all do not systematically engage in idolatry. There are some who prize the privilege of being the people of God, and grieve to witness the abominations that surround them. The state of mind in which they entertain these feelings has been produced by the Spirit of God. He has caused them to differ from a world that lieth in wickedness. He has excited in their souls the senti-

ments they experience. And he will not desert them.

When God prepares to punish, he never forgets his people. Lot is saved in the ruin of Sodom, and Jeremiah is protected in the destruction of Jerusalem. Not a hair of their heads can perish. They cannot be plucked from the hand of their Saviour. Having been marked by "the man clothed with linen, which has the writer's inkhorn by his side," they are safe when the sentence of condemnation is executed; for the destroying angels have received the command, "come not near any man upon whom is the mark."

My brethren, we believe the agent of mercy is abroad in the world now, setting a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst of us. Are we, think you, subjects for his work? Let us attempt to sketch the picture of those whom he singles out from an ungodly world, and then estimate our hopes and prospects. The persons who are to receive the mark are described by a single trait of

their character. They are those "that sigh and that cry for the abominations that be done in the midst" of them. But it would not be easy to assign a single trait so absolutely decisive of the state of the heart. There is but one class of persons who feel any sorrow for the prevalence of sin. Men never begin to sorrow for sin in others till they have mourned deeply for it in themselves. The love of God must have been lit up in the heart; the man must have got new tastes, new desires, new feelings, before he will feel any real sorrow for the dishonour done to God by the sins of others. The profession of religion may be deceptive, it may be delusion, or hypocrisy. Many a one calls upon the name of Christ, whom he will deny that he ever knew. The language of devotion may be heard where the heart is cold; and the heart itself is sometimes warmed for a short space with feelings, that are but the offspring of a heated imagination. But when a man is once sincerely interested for the honour of God; when it is a cause of sorrow to him that God is despised and neglected; when

rivers of waters run down his eyes because men keep not the Divine law;—then there is pretty clear evidence that he is in earnest in his profession, and that he has really imbibed a love of holiness.

But we may mistake even here. We may think attachment to a party, and jealousy of those who oppose us, to be the feeling required. We may envy successful sinners, and think that we do but hate their sins. We may have a natural distaste for particular vices, and mistake a merely human feeling for concern for the honour of God. Every thing really precious will have its counterfeit. We must take care that we do not impose upon ourselves. To "sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst" of us, is not to entertain narrow and exclusive feelings towards our fellow-men; it is not to constitute ourselves and those that think with us the only depositaries of the truth, and to look with contempt on those who do not subscribe to our peculiarities; it is not to speak with rancour and bitterness of those whom we may, whether right or

wrong, choose to consider as mischievous persons—it is to grieve for sin *as such*; it is to mourn for the misery it brings upon the world, to humble ourselves for it, as bearing the same nature as obstinate sinners, and looking for salvation to the Redeemer, whom they despise; it is to labour according to our means to oppose sin; to show ourselves publicly on God's side, to endeavour to strengthen the hands of those who contend for the truth, to do what we can to spread the knowledge of the Gospel. Those who "sigh and cry for the abominations that are done in the midst" of them, must be praying persons; they are not the thoughtless creatures who flutter through life without reflection or care. The state of a world well nigh sunk in idolatry, will not admit of habits of levity; it would seem to compel meditation and thoughtfulness.

But, my brethren, it is not necessary to enlarge on this subject. The state of mind required, is so finely painted by these words of inspiration, that it scarcely needs illustration. Is it ours? How do we

regard sin? Is it a light thing in our eyes? Do we excuse it, or laugh at it; or do we weigh it in the balance of the sanctuary, and look upon it as what God represents a deadly thing—a plague, a leprosy, treason against Heaven? All our professions of religion are vain, unless we regard it thus. We know nothing of repentance, we know nothing of faith; no, nor of holiness in thought, or word, or work, till our religion rests on a right estimate of sin; till we sigh and cry for the abominations done in the midst of us, within us, and around us. May God show us the evil of sin! for then, and not till then, can we glory in the cross of Christ, in the salvation of the Gospel.

There is, however, nothing that man can do that can save him. It is only by God's setting his mark upon us that we can obtain exemption from the general ruin. We must be sprinkled with the blood of Christ. We must by faith lay hold of the work of the Saviour. It is not what we can, but what God does for us. This only we may trust to. It is not the most poignant sor-

row, or the most lively desires for holiness, that can save us. It is only God's mercy in Christ. May God set the mark of faith upon us! May his messenger of mercy single us out from those who have many of them inherited the same privileges, but have despised them! And then, when the execution of the sentence takes place, nothing will harm us; the slaughter weapon will not come near us. Death in God's good time will come, but it will be in mercy. For we shall in Abraham's bosom wait our Lord's coming, and finally be for ever with the Lord.

SERMON XIX.

DIVINE GRACE.

1 Cor. xv. 10.

"By the grace of God I am what I am."

There is no better proof of true holiness than humility. Our condition in the sight of God is pretty correctly determined by the estimate we form of ourselves. The unconverted and unbelieving man, however great and aggravated may have been his sins, is ever disposed to excuse and palliate them. Place before him his offences, and charge him upon the showing of those offences with having violated God's holy law, and incurred the ruin of his soul. He will acknowledge the fact, and probably admit the correctness of the

general inference: but he will at the same time not forget to tell you that he did no more than others under similar circumstances would have done; that he yielded to temptation of unusual violence; that, in fact, it could not have been otherwise. This is the way in which the natural man meets the charge of sin. Let us reverse the picture, and see how the spiritual man conducts himself with regard to it. Look at him in the hour when the charge, "Thou art the man," rises up against him, when there is brought out in his conscience a vivid recollection of his transgression. Is there any attempt at excuse or palliation? is there any, the most remote insinuation that he sinned upon compulsion, and that consequently God is the Author of sin? No! there is nothing but confession, and repentance, and humility. His language is, "I have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto me confusion of face." All that is

evil in him is the produce of his own corrupt will, of his own evil heart. What is good in him has been wrought in him by the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift,—"By the grace of God I am what I am."

The Scriptures afford us several examples of the feelings of the servants of God under conviction of sin. We must remember the instance of Hezekiah. We have just heard the language of Daniel—the text presents us with the words of Paul. These distinguished saints excelled ordinary men in humility as much as they did in holiness. When they had made their greatest attainments in the fear and love of God, they were most alive to their own deficiencies.

The remarkable privileges by which St. Paul was distinguished, seem to have rendered him more humble. He rarely speaks of himself as the honoured instrument employed so extensively in the works of the Gospel, without alluding to his own unworthiness. He never forgot that the Lord whom he persecuted, arrested him in

his infatuated career; that while he was left to himself he refuted the truth, and grievously ravaged the Church. And he felt, felt with self-loathing, that had not a high and holy influence interfered for his rescue, he would have gone on making havoc of believers, and treasuring up wrath against his own soul. In the passage in immediate connexion with the words of the text, he is setting forth the evidence of our Lord's resurrection which is derived from the fact of his appearing to various persons among his disciples after his death. "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." He does not thus reckon himself among the witnesses of the resurrection, without expressing his conviction, that he deserved not to be singled out for so great an honour. "For I am the least of the apostles, that

am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; but by the grace of God I am what I am;" as if he had said, My former unbelief and violence reduce me to a much lower rank than the original disciples. I have been made a Christian and a preacher by the free mercy of God.

The text sets before us an important feature in the character of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and the humility of such a man would afford matter for an interesting inquiry. But I would treat the words not as exhibiting individual character, but as expressing a general truth —as words which each one of us may make his own, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

The word which our translators have rendered grace, may also be rendered goodness, or favour; and with a reference to the original meaning of the word, the passage might be translated, "By the mercy or favour of God I am what I am." But that peculiar operation of the Divine mercy, by which the soul is brought from

its natural state to a spiritual state, is generally distinguished in theological language, by the word "grace." It is clear from the context, that the favour which the Apostle expressly acknowledges, was this gracious aid of the Holy Spirit; for he says immediately afterwards, "his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me;" where the word evidently cannot bear any other meaning.

But in every sense which the word will bear, we may each of us most certainly say, "By the grace of God I am what I am." By the mercy of God we enjoy our lives and faculties. We exist by an exercise of the Divine wisdom and goodness. We owe our being to his favour, as evinced in creation. Every thing that distinguishes us from other beings, is derived from the same source. Reason and speech, which elevate our race so high above the other members of creation, were conferred by sovereign mercy. We are called, by every thought of these blessings, to acknowledge

with gratitude, that "by the grace of God we are what we are."

But the lives which God has given, God only can preserve. There needs just as great power to keep a created thing in life, as to give it life. Unless Omnipotence uphold it, it must relapse into nothing. And yet it can have no stronger claim to preservation, than it had to creation. That it *is* preserved, is a proof of the Divine goodness. It is the mercy, the favour of God, which has preserved us in life—that has kept us amid the dangers to which we are continually exposed, by which we have been often threatened. But there are circumstances under which life may be regarded rather as a misery than a blessing. What is man without the enjoyment of reason? And yet, on what a poor tenure do we hold our reason! We carry our most precious faculty about with us in a tabernacle which may almost be said to be at war with it. It sympathises, nicely sympathises, with the body, and from its intimate connexion with so faithless a companion, is in constant jeopardy. The highest and most

aspiring minds stand often on the very brink of madness, and the lowest and most grovelling minds are often separated but by a step from positive imbecility. The Creator alone can keep up the regular working of the wonderful machinery; and if we enjoy a sound and healthy intellect, it "is by the grace of God we are what we are."

But there are diseases beside the diseases of mind, which may strip life of happiness, and plunge us in suffering. Our bodies have been so polluted by sin, that misery seems sometimes to claim them as its own, and to treat them as its bond-slaves. Every portion of our body is the province of some particular disease. Every kind and description of pain are constantly exercising their cruel influence over some of us. Our passions, and our labours, and our cares, are continually exposing us to some of the modifications of physical evil, and laying us open to the brand of suffering. If we are not racked by pain, if we are not pining in sickness—Oh, with what gratitude are we

called upon to acknowledge the Divine goodness, and in thankful adoration to confess, that "by the grace of God we are what we are!"

We depend on God's providential mercy for every moment of life, of health, of reason. It is still more evident that we are dependent on his favour for every spiritual blessing. Man is now but the miserable wreck of God's workmanship. "God created man upright, but he has found out many inventions." In Adam all died: and such is our present condition, that "we go astray from our birth;" and unless arrested in our career of sinfulness, never stop short till we have effected our own ruin. We have but to look around us to see the working of this natural process. And these representations of the Scriptures are not mere declamation—they do not contain one particle of exaggeration; and so bring in abundant proof of the perfect accuracy of the most melancholy statements of the word of God.

What has mankind been in the various communities that have not enjoyed the

light of revelation? What is it still? Idolatrous, cruel, licentious. Call to mind the vile and lascivious practices sanctioned and encouraged by the superstitions of the most polished nations of antiquity. Look at the wretched Hindoo dragging the car of his shapeless idol, or haply throwing himself beneath its wheels; and then think of our privileges—of our pure theology, of our perfect morality, of our reasonable service; and while you remember that these blessings were not of our own seeking, or of our discovering, but taught us by a revelation from God; say, whether every one of us is not bound to exclaim in overwhelming thankfulness, "By the grace of God I am what I am!"

But, my brethren, it is not knowledge merely that can make us what we should be. It is not knowledge; no, not even knowledge of the truth of God, that can transform the natural man into the spiritual man—that can make us, instead of the enemies, the friends of God. This is, alas! a truth, of which we need not go far for evidence. In Christian lands, and amid

Christian privileges, and in spite of Christian instruction, the great majority of men are ever found living in a state of immorality, or insensibility, or worldliness. Though the Gospel is proclaimed among us, and the means of diffusing it are extensively employed, we have only to look out upon our own population to find abundant proof of what I have just asserted. We find a large proportion of those around us devoting themselves to the gratification of their appetites, and living as those who are never to die; others, who are living without any thought of another state, who seem to be perfectly careless about their souls; and others, again, who are completely engrossed by the concerns of the present world. This is all perfectly natural for man in his present state: his heart naturally bends to earth as its centre. It requires an influence from without, a higher, a Divine influence, to lead him to set his affection on the things above. My brethren, if we have been brought to feel the necessity of looking to the interest of our souls, of choosing the

one thing needful, of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, it is "by the grace of God we are what we are."

It is not for us to attempt to solve the difficulties which probably surpass every intellect, but the Supreme intellect; or to reconcile the apparently contending truths which are evidently too high for man's ingenuity. I invite no such inquiry, and would not for a moment encourage you to enter upon unprofitable investigations. The whole tenor of revelation sufficiently proves that man is a free agent. God treats him as a free agent. We feel our free agency. But it is a certain truth that every thing that is good in man is the gift of God—that every pious thought, every holy determination, every heavenward wish, is put into our souls by the Holy Spirit. If we are living more regular lives than the wretched slaves of sensuality —if we are acting with a view to eternity —if we are living above the world and its vanities,—we are met by the question, which should beat down every aspiring thought, "Who maketh thee to differ? and what

hast thou that thou didst not receive?" and by the humbling consideration, that "by the grace of God we are what we are."

The first dawn of religion in the soul is the effect of the Divine goodness. The influence of the Holy Spirit makes fertile the barren soil, and changes the heart of stone into the heart of flesh. The same influence must carry on the work. The same grace which convinces us of our own guilt and danger, and of our inability of ourselves to escape "the wrath to come," must bring us to receive the Gospel plan of revelation. And when we have, in deep conviction of our lost condition, sought refuge in the cross of Christ, and, confessing ourselves to be miserable sinners, have fixed all our hopes on the Saviour, this grace alone can uphold us in this blessed faith, and enable us to testify our faith by a life of holiness. This grace alone can enable us to advance in the Christian course, that, having successfully struggled with the enemies of our souls, we may at length attain the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled in heaven.

My brethren, "by the grace of God we are what we are." His providential goodness preserves our lives, our reason, our health, our comforts; our public and private privileges. The influence of the Holy Spirit upon our souls produces all that is good and lovely in us, and keeps us from the enormities that are working the ruin of others. If we have sincerely devoted ourselves to the service of God, it is still "by the grace of God that we are what we are." What is this consideration calculated to teach us? I have already had occasion to notice what it naturally first suggests to us. It is above all things calculated to *make us humble.* We have indeed, nothing to be proud of. All that we have that is worth having, is the gift of God. We have been singled out to receive it, not for our own worthiness, but in the exercise of his mere mercy. This, at least, should bring down every high thought within us, and keep us from thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

But it is evidently calculated to lead us

to feel *the propriety of giving ourselves up to the service of God.* This is so evident, that it needs not to be enlarged upon. We owe all to our Father in heaven. Shall we feel no gratitude? We can express our gratitude only by living to him. Shall we turn against him the powers which he has spared, the benefits which he has given? Being bought with a price, shall we not glorify God, with our bodies and our spirits, which are God's? We must be insensible indeed, if we are not stirred up to show ourselves on the Lord's side, by the thought that "by the grace of God we are what we are."

My brethren, I add but a few words more; they must be words of warning. What effect has this truth upon us? Does it make us humble and active? If it does not, our condition is in the highest degree dangerous. What God has given, God can withdraw. We may quench the Spirit, and if we receive the grace of God in vain, it will be hereafter but an aggravation of our misery, that we can now say—"By the grace of God, we are what we are."

SERMON XX.

THE TESTIMONIES OF GOD WONDERFUL.

PSALM cxix. 129.

"Thy testimonies are wonderful."

THE hundred and nineteenth Psalm may be regarded as an inspired poem in honour of revealed truth. It is well nigh filled with the praises of the word of God. In almost every sentence the sacred writer celebrates the various excellences of the Divine law, and under different names proclaims it as of surpassing value. The subject of his holy strain is one which he cannot exhaust, and one of which he cannot be wearied; and the noble composition in which it is treated, is at once the longest and the most elaborate among the songs of Zion. The feelings he has expressed are those which

ever prevail in the heart of the believer. Every individual of that "great multitude which no man can number, that, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, stand before the throne, and before the Lamb," has regarded the book of God just as the Psalmist regarded it; has delighted himself in his commandments, has loved his precepts, and looked upon his testimonies as wonderful.

It does not seem at all necessary to prove, that by the word "testimonies," in the text, the Psalmist means the revealed will of God. Among the many names by which the book of Revelation is distinguished in this Psalm, this is one of the most frequent. It is employed in this sense upwards of twenty times; and it is by no means exclusively in this Psalm that the word is thus employed. The words "testimony" and "testimonies," occur repeatedly in other parts of Scripture with the same signification. They originally applied, as the word does in the text, to that most important communication of the will of God, which was made to Moses.

But all Scripture is most appropriately distinguished by the same description ; and I would invite you to regard the title in its most extensive application, as including the whole Bible, while we examine the expressive words, " Thy testimonies are wonderful."

And this is by no means to do violence to the word. A title that is applied to a part of the word of God may well be applied to all; and that not only because all proceeds from the same Author, and is given with the same object, but because all treats of the same matter, and sets forth the same eternal truth. May the Holy Spirit be with us, while we meditate upon the inspired words, " Thy testimonies are wonderful !"

Now of the various particulars in which we trace the correctness of the description of the Psalmist, there is one which stands greatly prominent :—the Scriptures are surpassingly " wonderful," *as coming from God.* They are the testimonies of Jehovah, the communication that has been made to the human race by the high and lofty One,

that inhabiteth eternity. They "came not in old time, by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." There cannot surely well be any thing more wonderful, than that the Creator should hold converse with his creatures. That the infinite Being should condescend to communicate the truth to children of the dust; weak in their original constitution, and fallen from the state in which He placed them. Well might the Israelites, who witnessed the transactions of Sinai, say, in astonishment, "We have seen this day, that God doth talk with man, and he liveth." For it might well have been expected, that he would never "shew his glory and his greatness," but to vindicate his power and justice in the destruction of a disobedient race. The more we reflect on the perfections of God, the more we must be disposed to regard it as astonishing, that he should have made to a man a written communication of his will; and when we think of the Divine origin of the Scriptures, we cannot but exclaim with

the Psalmist—"Thy testimonies are wonderful."

It would naturally be expected, that a communication made by God would bear strong internal evidence of its origin. The face of Moses, when he came down from the Mount, was still irradiated with the splendour which prevails in the presence of the Father of lights. The book of God might be expected to be illumined with the glory of its Almighty Author, and to bear about it visible tokens of having descended from heaven; and such is really the case. God's testimonies are wonderful. There is a sacredness, and a self-evidence about them, which nothing but wilful blindness can overlook. They are wonderful, *from the subjects of which* they treat: they make known to us truths with which we could never have become acquainted, had not God himself revealed them. They set before us the perfections of God, and they make known to us what it is necessary for us to know of the nature of God. They tell us of the creation of the visible world; of the state in which

man was created; of the way in which he fell from original righteousness; of his history since he has been in his present state; of the way, which, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, God has devised to restore him. They tell us of the Word becoming flesh, and dwelling among men, as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; of his receiving in his own person the penalty which was due to the sins of man; of his being crucified for our offences, and rising again for our justification, and ascending into heaven to make intercession for us, and to save to the uttermost. They tell us also of the Holy Spirit being ready to help our infirmities, and to afford us strength according to our necessities. All this is so very far beyond what we could ourselves have discovered—so surprising, so astonishing—that it may well be said of that Being who has revealed them, "Thy testimonies are wonderful."

There is nothing which comes from man which does not bear the marks of man's impression. His noblest works will always be found to contain traces of his limited

powers. The microscope, which discovers an exquisite finish and a beautiful completeness in the most minute things of God's workmanship, does but expose the clumsiness of man's workmanship. The most splendid results of architectural skill have almost uniformly laid the artists open to the shafts of criticism. Are they bold and spirited?—it is likely that they are just at variance with a classical refinement. Are they pure, and chaste, and elegant?—it is likely that they want in originality, what they have gained in delicacy. But none can cavil at the architecture of the forest, none can complain of the style in which the God of all the earth has decked the fair form of nature. It needs not an elevated taste, or an exalted judgment, to appreciate the beauties with which we are surrounded—though the more elevated our taste and the more severe our judgment, the better we shall be able to estimate the glories of creation. Let us carry the comparison to the efforts of man's powers as displayed in writing. Let us compare his achievements in eloquence,

and philosophy, with the book of heaven; and who does not feel in his heart the sentiment which the Psalmist has embodied in the words, "Thy testimonies are wonderful!" They are wonderful, from *the truth* which forms their substance, and the language in which they are conveyed. Their matter is truth, without any mixture of error; and it is addressed to us in a style at once majestic and animated. We know too well the character of what man has written—one generation of writers has had but to remedy the errors of another. Age after age, our race has been accumulating a long experience. And one of the greatest advantages we derive from that experience is, that we are able to detect the mistakes and fallacies which have been written by the wise and great. And we have great occasion for the knowledge with which we are thus supplied. The speculations of the finest intellects, and the inquiries of the most judicious and candid philosophers, have usually resulted in much more of error than of truth—a natural law has branded on every thing human

the word "imperfect." But when we come to the book of God, we find a perfect moral system. We have reached an oasis in the desert of shifting sand. And when we drink of the river of the water of life, and quench a thirst for truth in draughts from the stream that flows from the throne of God — if we are not devoid of gratitude, we must exclaim in devout thankfulness, "Thy testimonies are wonderful!"

And the manner in which they are written is not less wonderful, than the matter they contain. In human compositions we admire particular excellences — in the Bible we find all excellences combined. In the writing of the same sacred penman, we often find what is most delicate and beautiful in immediate connection with what is most sublime and impressive. They address alike the intellect and the heart. In the simple and severe style of history,—in the closeness and weight of argument, — in the loveliness and loftiness of poetry, they are equally perfect. So perfect, as to have

often extorted even from prejudiced hearers the confession, "Thy testimonies are wonderful."

And then look at their beautiful adaptation to the object they were intended to effect. How completely they set forth the truth! How plainly they set before us what we are to believe and what we are to do! They are not composed in a systematic form, but the form in which they come to us is much more impressive than any system could have been. Perhaps one of the most wonderful things about the Scriptures is the way in which God has been pleased to adopt man's language, and to illustrate the things of heaven by referring to objects with which we are familiar. Whatever is the state of the reader, he is able to derive instruction from them. The most ignorant can lay hold of its plain statements—and the most educated will but have the greater cause for admiration. Are we in sorrow?—they are the source of encouragement. Are we rejoicing at what the Lord has done for us?—they afford us songs of praise.

Well may we say with the Psalmist that God's "testimonies are wonderful."

But every thing truly that concerns the Scriptures is wonderful. Among the various external circumstances it is difficult to choose which we should particularize, and we cannot dwell on all. Their evidence is wonderful. The men who wrote them were enabled to foretel the future and to perform miracles. The prophecies have been fulfilled, and are in fact still being fulfilled, with perfect accuracy; and the laws of evidence will not allow us to reject the body of testimony alleged in support of the miraculous facts. And then they carry in themselves their own evidence—the various internal circumstances we have already noticed are so many proofs of their having come from God. And all this is additional to that inward feeling by which the believer sets to his seal that God is true—the witness in himself, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And not less wonderful is their transmission and preservation. The malice of enemies, and the course of time, have

never torn them from the custody of the Church. Israel was entrusted with the ancient Scriptures; and though persecutors attempted to destroy them, and faithless generations neglected them, and at length the popular teachers had made them of none effect through their traditions—yet Israel preserved his trust—and the universal Church received at his hands the precious gift sacred and inviolate. It was augmented by a noble addition. The Old Testament was joined by the New. The Church was made its guardian; and though persecutors sought to destroy it, and though heretics sought to corrupt it, and the Church herself became corrupt and yielded to an usurped power, yet she never betrayed her trust: and when it pleased God to raise up men to reform her, they were guided in their work by the blessed Book which, even in her most degraded state, she still pressed to her bosom as the Word of God. We have had ample proof that the Bible is indestructible; for though it has often been in the hottest fire, it has not been consumed. We need not

other illustrations of the fact that God's "testimonies are wonderful."

But how ought this fact to affect us? We have in our hands this wonderful communication—how ought we to regard it, and to treat it? It is clearly our duty to make ourselves acquainted with it—to "search the Scriptures." We know and acknowledge that "in them we have eternal life, and that it is they which testify of the Saviour;" it might be thought, therefore, that we should apply to them with eagerness, and peruse them with interest; and that not as a duty, but as an instinct. Think of the animation with which we read a letter from an absent friend. Think of the curiosity, of the excitement, with which we read any communication which we think likely to affect our present condition; and, surely, it might be supposed that we should feel some interest about a message from heaven—and we shall feel an interest, a surpassing interest, in that message, unless we are dead in trespasses and sins, unless our souls are in the full occupation of the soul's enemies. The

testimonies of God deserve our constant and attentive study. They "are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." But they can afford us saving instruction, only when we approach them with a hearty desire of spiritual knowledge, only when we are desirous of knowing the truth, of being made acquainted with the mind and will of God.

But a communication from God ought not only to excite our interest, but to *command our reverence.* As the "testimonies of God are wonderful," we ought to regard them with humility and awe. It is quite right, doubtless, for us first to satisfy ourselves that they are what they profess to be. But when we have once ascertained that they are a message from heaven, the only reasonable course is to believe what they reveal, and to do what they enjoin. The highest reason is to submit our reason to the wisdom of God—the highest prudence is to inquire what he would have us to do. It will be at our peril that we cavil at it, or despise it. It will be well

for us to take heed that we be not found fighting against God. It is only when we come to the Bible in a teachable spirit, that we have any reason to expect a blessing; for "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." We can read the Scriptures with profit only when we pray over them; for it is only that Holy Spirit who gave the Bible, who can apply its sacred truths to our minds, and carry them to our hearts.

Possessing, as we do, the oracles of God; having the free use of the most complete revelation which was ever made to man—we are evidently called *upon for gratitude.* "Prophets and kings have desired to see the things which we see, and have not seen them; and to hear the things which we hear, and have not heard them." What "hath been hid from ages, and from generations, is now made manifest" to us. And surely it becomes us to receive with thankfulness the superior privileges which our Father in heaven has been pleased to grant us. But there is but one way of evincing our gratitude. If by Divine grace we have

been made sensible of the goodness of God, in making known to us the truth, we shall avail ourselves of the truth. It is quite vain to praise God's testimonies as wonderful, unless they have touched our hearts. It is not the gratitude of the lips that will profit us with that Being who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. He will acknowledge no gratitude that does not lead us to devote ourselves to his service. *That* is a barren admiration, indeed, that does but lead us to a mere acknowledgment of the Divine mercy. Oh, may the truth, my brethren, not tend to harden our hearts, but to convert our hearts! May we be on our guard against the devices of Satan! Let us not think that we are anything the better for simply admiring the truth, if the truth does not make us free. In vain shall we acknowledge that God's testimonies are wonderful, unless we love them, and study them, and make them the rule of our faith and practice. And oh, that God would pour out upon us a spirit of prayer! Would that our hearts might be

filled with a desire of Divine instruction
Would that we felt more of the vanity
this wretched world, more of our need
something better to satisfy us; and, the
when we came to the Scriptures, and foun
in them a Saviour, we should, in real grat
tude, acknowledge that God's "testimoni
are wonderful."

SERMON XXI.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TRUE GLORY.

JEREMIAH ix. 23, 24.

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

THESE words are stated by the prophet to be a direct communication from God himself. They are marked off from other passages, which he was himself inspired to utter, by the sublime announcement, "Thus saith the Lord." May He who addressed them to his ancient people, and preserved

them for the benefit of the Church, grant that we may examine them with profit to our souls!

A review of the provocations of rebellious Judah, had been followed up by the Prophet, by an impressive prediction of impending judgments. "Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? . . . . I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant . . . . . I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them." In an age of general corruption, the warning voice of an inspired messenger might have been expected to cause but little excitement, and to make but small impression. Satisfied of their country's prosperity when she was in her utmost need, when she had already been weakened by an invader, and was on the very eve of ruin, the degenerate Jews still fondly trusted that they possessed the

means of deliverance. Jehovah's prophets were neglected and persecuted, and when the threatened judgments were plainly at hand, yea, when they were already being inflicted, they still refused to hear a word of reproof or admonition, and clung with a senseless obstinacy to the hope of safety. They forgot that it was more than human strength that had hitherto defended them, that the God whom they neglected would aid those only who trust in him. Greatly, therefore, did they need to be reminded that nothing human is to be depended on for security, and that none have a right to cherish the hope of safety, who do not found that hope on the favour of God. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

I shall endeavour to illustrate from these

words the danger of depending on created good, and necessity of looking for substantial enjoyment entirely to the knowledge of God.

The words themselves present an enumeration of all the world affords to which the thinking man would allow the name of good things—wisdom, power, and riches. I say the thinking man, for the poor slaves of sensuality will not find their idol in the list, and it is not worthy of such company. The world's game is not played by the weak things that can stake nothing higher than their debaucheries. The higher affairs of a community are not likely to be much influenced by them. The real actors perhaps smile upon them, but it is but to prey upon them. When they deem themselves fit to derive enjoyment from the pleasures of the brute, they regard themselves unworthy of employments of man. It would be indeed a bitter sarcasm to bid them glory in their pleasures. There are, also, those among them whose "glory is in their shame." But their boasting is but the crackling of thorns under a pot. It

soon burns out, and subsides into a few poor ashes. In their most joyous hours they are well aware that they are *gaining* nothing. They know full well they are wasting life, and lowering themselves in the scale of existence. Reasonable men may be warned against the fascination of learning, of power, of riches. It is to forego the distinction conferred by that, the highest of our faculties, to yield to sensual pleasure.

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." If there is any thing man may be proud of, surely it is *wisdom;* the cultivation of those noble powers that give him rank among intelligent beings, and place him as high above the inferior animals, as *they* are above inanimate things. The mind of man has felt the blighting influence of the first transgression. It is now in ruins. But admirable indeed was the original fabric; and even in its present weakness, it is a noble proof of the power and wisdom of its Divine Artificer. Great still are its capabilities. It can trace the laws which have been laid down for the govern-

ment of the universe. It can measure the distances between the lights of heaven, and discover the agencies which are at work upon the earth, and the air, and the waters. It can analyse the processes of thought. It can invent, and combine, and distinguish. It may be a small thing to possess these powers without improving and exercising them, but it must be confessed to be something to have attained wisdom, to have applied the faculties of the mind to the acquirement of knowledge; to have made acquaintance with the mysteries of science, and to have made some progress in intellectual truth. Yes, it is this, if any thing, which exalts man in his present state; which sets him above his fellows, and brings him nearer to more perfect beings. And yet he may not glory in it. Human wisdom is, after all, not a thing for man to be proud of. It is not the end for which he lives. Whatever degree of it he attains, it is very doubtful whether he is the happier for it. He may not be proud of his acquirements, for it is clearly the providence of that Being who ordereth all

things that has placed him in circumstances for attaining them. With the highest degree of knowledge, he knows but in part. In whatever direction he pursues wisdom, there is a bound fixed which he cannot pass. Let him ascend as high as he may, there is a height still higher. The greater his knowledge, the more he is made to feel his knowledge to be limited and unsatisfying. The wisest of men have ever been ready to confess their conviction of the smallness of their attainments, and the *inspired* sage has included human wisdom in the general sentence, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." It cannot satisfy the wants of his soul.

"Neither let the mighty man glory in his might." There is something which seems to be quite intoxicating in power over our fellow men. Emulation is almost an instinctive feeling, and those who are the most talented seem most to feel its influence. Bodily strength confers superiority. Mental vigour confers still greater superiority. One man may be strong in

an iron frame and a robust constitution, another in conscious power of mind and the influence which it enables him to obtain over others. All human power is as nothing. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." Disease will bring low the strongest. Adversity will do the bidding of the great Disposer, and lay waste the proudest fortune. We read the blasphemous threatenings of the Assyrian, and his haughty confidence in his conquering army; we read on, and find, that "when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." Nebuchadnezzar walks in the palace of his kingdom, and says, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" And what follows? He becomes a madman and an outcast. "The kingdom is departed from him," and he

is the companion of the brutes. Oh, no! "the mighty man may not glory in his might." Man has no strength to boast of. All he has is "not his own, but given." It may be removed in a moment.

"Let not the rich man glory in his riches." Man needs but little for the supply of his necessary wants; all that he possesses more than he requires for the gratification of his immediate necessities, just marks the command he has over the services of others. Great wealth places at the disposal of its possessor all the accessible good the world has to bestow. The great majority pay a ready homage to it; and the rich man, from knowing its influence, is sorely tempted to glory in it. And yet, of all the sources of superiority among men, it is the most trivial. The possession of wealth does not suppose talent, or valour, or any kind of real excellence. It is often most largely in the hands of a fool who squanders it, a wretch who worships it. There is nothing in it calculated to raise the character of the possessor; it seems rather calculated to harden the

heart, and weaken the mind. And then its uncertainty. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." If they continue, life may not continue. "Let not the rich man glory in his riches," but keep in his memory that striking parable:—one "said to his soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

In what then may man glory? Is all exultation forbidden? May he entertain no confidence? No, he is only forbidden to joy in what is worthless, to trust in what is vain and unstable. The poor buildings are taken down, and the ruins removed, only that a substantial and graceful fabric may occupy their place. God requires us to renounce the world and ourselves, not that we may mourn in hopeless despondence, and listless melancholy; but, from feeling that there is nothing to depend upon in the creature, we may look for hap-

piness in the Creator himself. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

The only real enjoyment must be derived from knowing God. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me." To know God, is not merely to be persuaded of the fact that God exists, and that he is the Creator and Preserver of all that exists, but to know all that he has taught us about himself; all that has been revealed about the Divine nature: that he exists as the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier; and that he has exercised his creating, redeeming, and sanctifying power *on us*. That it may with any correctness be said of us, that we understand and know God, we must thus realize all that God has been pleased to make known.

Little has been revealed to us respecting the Divine nature; and it is only what has been revealed, that can be the subject

of faith. Much has been revealed respecting the Divine attributes. We are supplied with abundant information concerning the character of God. All that we are taught is matter of confidence. We are to glory in him, as he is "the Lord which exerciseth lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things he delights." And truly, every view of the Divine character exhibits what we may well glory in. We glory in perfection when we glory in God.

The ancient Israelite found enough in what was revealed by the old Covenant to lead him to seek pardon by a Mediator, and sanctification by Divine grace. The kingdom of God is come unto us. He "has given to us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." God reveals himself to us as the God of the Gospel—the system in which he has provided for man a complete salvation—in which he offers him a free salvation. Every point of view, in which we can regard God's attributes of justice, and mercy, and faithfulness, is calculated

to fill us with admiration. But we must feel an interest in them, we must be ourselves affected by them, before we can glory in them. We become engaged in a covenant with God, by receiving the Gospel. When we feel our lost state by nature, and by actual transgression, and the utter impossiblity of obtaining deliverance of ourselves, from the curse of the law which we have violated; and under the influence of these feelings avail ourselves, in humility, of the "only name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved," the name of Jesus; then we have a direct interest in the Divine perfections. We must glory in the Lord. We must have a triumphant sense of the glorious attributes of our covenant God No one can feel the relation in which he stands to his now reconciled Father, who does not feel a sense of exultation in the thought of what that Father is. He is little disposed to glory in aught besides. The faith which enables him to see the things that are invisible—to regard himself as ever in the presence of God, and to look forward to the certain and

speedy enjoyment of the Jerusalem which is above, will not allow him to fix his affections on aught below, much less to feel satisfaction in them, or to glory in them. His language is that of the apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is his sole glory that "he understandeth and knoweth the Lord, who delights in the exercise of loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness;" that he has been delivered from the curse and the power of sin, and has been enabled by free grace to accept the great salvation of the Gospel.

My brethren, have we effectually heard God speaking to us, in the solemn and beautiful words to which I have now endeavoured to direct your attention? Have we ceased from man, and every thing human, and learned to seek satisfaction in the Gospel representations of God? We must all be well convinced of the creature's inability to satisfy the cravings of our souls, or to afford us any real enjoyment. Do we in any sense still glory in the creature? Are we expecting hap-

piness from wisdom, or power, or wealth? Let us apply to ourselves the question of searching self-examination with regard to our favourite pursuits. We know the inclination of our hearts. Let us exercise a severe jealousy over our inclination, that we be not mastered by it—that we be not led to glory in the pursuit to which it draws us. But in our very resolutions we must be on our guard against pride and self-confidence. We can ourselves do nothing. Sin is our own, every thing holy in us must be from God. Let us pray then for the Holy Spirit's influence to keep us from glorying in ourselves—to preserve us from the dangerous delusion of supposing we can ourselves do any thing which God will regard with favour.

Do we glory in this—That we understand and know God—the God of the Gospel—the God who has revealed himself to us in his Son—"through *whom* we have access by one Spirit unto the Father?" Do we "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord?" Do we regard our

privileges as Christians, as the thing which is most worthy of our grateful acknowledgements to Him, who has caused us to differ from those who possess them not, or who value them not? If our hearts are cold, when we think of the Lord which exercises loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness, in the earth, and delights in these things—there is something greatly amiss in us. We have not a due sense of the evil of sin; for to whom much has been forgiven, he loveth much. Or we have not a realizing sense of our heavenly Father's love—of its freeness, of its extent. Let us pray for more faith—that we may glory more in what he is, and in what he has been, to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XXII.

HUMILITY.

PROVERBS xviii. 12.

"Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility."

THIS is a favourable sentiment with Solomon. In preceding chapters of this book of Proverbs the same idea is frequently expressed. "When pride cometh," he says in the 11th chapter, "then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." In the 15th, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility." And again in the 16th, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." These passages all evidently inculcate the same sentiment, indeed they scarcely differ in

expression, and agree with the text in teaching us that, "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility."

It is not difficult to show that this is a most certain truth—and yet it is in its proper and most extensive sense a truth we owe to revelation. The natural man is not fond of believing in the necessity of humility. It is a duty he is much rather disposed to despise, or to deny. He contends for the dignity of his nature, he asserts the sufficiency of his own powers. And thus, by disputing, he establishes the certainty of the maxim, that "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility."

Unaided man has been able to discover a considerable number of important truths in the theory of morals. When the intellect has been employed on this subject, it has always been able to draw largely on the conscience, while on the other hand the conscience has frequently been directed by the mind. The polished nations of antiquity, whose superiority to

the rest of the world depended for the most part on their superior institutions, were ever inquiring, with their characteristic ardour and acuteness, into the nature and bearings of the several relations of the various members of the body politic. With them morals formed a part of the science of government. They examined into morals, and erected systems of morals, not with a view to ascertain and lay down the duties of the *man*, but of the *citizen*. They recognize no dependence but on the state, they consider no relations but with fellow-men, they regulate conduct only with a view to life, and represent death as the end of being. It is very evident that the Christian has no right to expect much assistance from this quarter. And if he did, he would not find it. For as they do not rest on the right foundation or aim at the right end, the ancient ethics are miserably defective, and often grievously false. In no part are they more delusive than in the estimate they teach men to make of themselves. They represent an independent self-sufficient spirit as the

most elevated form of human character. The greatest of the heathen moralists defines the magnanimous man to be, "one, who being a man of great worth, thinks himself worthy of great things." We readily see how completely all this is at variance with what revelation teaches. The natural feelings, and the unassisted reason of man, are equally opposed to the sentiment conveyed in the text,—that "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility."

The truth of these words equally holds, whether we regard them as a maxim for the regulation of our conduct in common life, or as conveying a rule for our guidance in the spiritual life. May the Holy Spirit enable us to examine them with profit to our souls!

Now, if we do but turn our eyes upon the world around us, we shall readily—alas! too readily—find instances of the connexion between pride and ruin. There is very great variety in the dispositions of men, there is a very great natural difference between the dispositions of different men,

and it is not well for us to set ourselves up for judges of our fellows. There are many men who have the misfortune to possess an unsocial and supercilious temperament, whom it would be in the highest degree unjust to charge with pride; and the Gospel was not designed to break down those proper distinctions between the different classes of society, which can never be violated with safety to the commonwealth. But after making all necessary and fitting exceptions, we are obliged to witness cases in which it is too evident that the heart is haughty. There are ever too many, of whom the charity, that thinketh no evil, cannot but allow that they are chargeable with pride. The way in which they speak and act, and the treatment which they extend to others, will not permit us to doubt about the feeling which reigns in their hearts. But the state of mind which I would describe—this independence, and self-estimation, and contempt of others—is generally the signal of ruin. Pride works the destruction of the man in whose heart it has taken up its

residence. It provokes the dislike and opposition of others, and infatuates the man himself. It is not safe to despise the things which would seem the most insignificant. The lion in the fable is stung to madness by the gad-fly. And in the course of events, it often comes within the power of the weakest to influence, in a very great degree, the fortunes of the strong. In wanton insolence, the proud often provoke a feeling which produces, and that not very indirectly, their ruin. Their fellows are not likely to tolerate an assumption of superiority. And men, in general, feel a pleasure in mortifying them, and not unfrequently instinctively unite to effect their destruction. And then, again, we know the infatuating nature of pride. It leads a man to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, to overvalue his powers and resources, to depend too much on his address or his good fortune, and so to expose himself to unnecessary danger, and to rush boldly into situations from which it may not be possible to escape. The pages of history repeatedly exhibit the process.

There are many among us who remember the time when the fairest portion of the continent of Europe was held in the vigorous grasp of the wonderful man, whom a remarkable series of events had made the ruler of a neighbouring land. In the providence of God, he was raised to a degree of prosperity truly astonishing. He stepped on the necks of kings, and was gazed upon with fond admiration by applauding millions. But his prosperity filled him with pride, and pride goeth before destruction. In his overweening insolence, he made all the world his enemies. In his extravagant self-sufficiency, he threw himself into inevitable danger. And when he had sacrificed the chief of his strength to his mad ambition, it was easy for congregated nations to hunt him from his throne. In this instance, we see the pride and the ruin on a large scale,—we can, most of us, call up recollections of what has taken place on the ordinary standard. And we none of us need to be persuaded that when the heart of a man is haughty, we have strong reason to expect his speedy destruction.

And it is not less certain that "before honour is humility." There is nothing which more frequently leads men to situations of respect and eminence, than modesty and diffidence. An impudent assurance has frequently an effect on the weak and the ignorant; but then they cannot confer any "honour" which is worth having. It is only the thinking and intelligent, who can confer "honour," whose good opinion is of value, and they never confer it but on those in whom they have seen humility. For they know full well, that there is no one who is not humble, who deserves honour. Every man of merit is so conscious of his deficiencies, he judges himself so severely, he adopts such an elevated standard of excellence, that he ever thinks humbly of himself. Thinking people know this, and give their verdict accordingly. And it is the thinking part of society that allot to a man his reputation. They are not so clamorous as the unthinking part, but their voice generally prevails. But it is not only in this way it is true, that "before honour is humility." Humility has an

effect upon the man himself, in whom it prevails. The man who feels himself to be far from his idea of excellence, is not likely to rest satisfied, till he has advanced nearer to it. The very existence of the feeling is a pledge of his progress. The sense of the smallness of his attainments, will drive him to make large attainments. And thus, as the cause precedes the effect, so before honour is humility.

But enough has been said on the words with regard to their application to the present life. Let us now look upon them in their application to the spiritual life. And truly when we consider them as conveying a maxim in religion, it needs no very extensive observation to be convinced that, "before destruction, the heart of man is haughty." For both in what regards faith, and what regards practice, pride inevitably leads to ruin. No one is likely to attain truth on spiritual subjects, who approaches them in a spirit of pride. In our present fallen condition, "such knowledge is too excellent for us, it is high, we cannot attain unto it," but

by the assistance of Divine Grace. The man who depends on his intelligence, who examines the objects of faith in a self-sufficient spirit, is quite sure to fall into infidelity or error. For he brings with him violent prejudice, he carries on his inquiries on wrong principles, he requires a kind of evidence that he will not meet with, and therefore it is quite easy to predict the result. The man "whose heart is haughty," instead of confining himself, as he ought to do, to the question whether or not the evidence which is alleged in proof of the Divine origin of the Scriptures, does actually prove their Divine origin, takes upon himself to judge of the character of their contents. He does not hesitate to decide what is worthy of God, and what is not worthy of God. He does not simply inquire, which it is very fit he should do, whether we have a message from God. He sets about criticising the message; and the consequence is, that he either rejects it altogether, or receives only such parts of it as fall in with his own prejudices. He treats the Gospel as a mere

fable, or abandons its peculiarities by rejecting what it teaches us respecting the nature of God, and the Deity of the Saviour, or what it teaches us with regard to the way of pardon and justification.

But suppose that the man whose heart is haughty does get to entertain orthodox opinions of religious truth; suppose that he does come to think that the Gospel has made a revelation of God, and that what the Gospel teaches is to be received in its obvious meaning; that man is a lost being, and that he can be reconciled to God only by the mediation of a Divine Saviour; that we have destroyed ourselves, and must utterly have perished had not help been laid upon One that is mighty; that we are at the best unprofitable servants, and can be accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings;"—it is not his opinions that can profit him: the truth must enter his heart as a living principle, before it can be of personal benefit to him. The very first effect which it has

in the heart is to bring down the reign of pride. For whenever pride reigns in a heart, there the kingdom of God is not set up. And after it has been banished as a dominant principle, if it reasserts its dominion, and so far succeeds, as it is from time to time likely to do, as to make "the heart haughty"—that is, forgetful of its dependence on God, and disposed to trust itself—*that* state is preparatory to a fall. The tempter scents his quarry—temptations thicken around; and if you have been able to trace the pride, it is not long before you will see the destruction. "Although all shall be offended," exclaims Peter, "yet will not I." And under the influence of that resolve, no sooner does he see his Lord in peril, than he draws his sword, and singly falls upon the multitude that had come out with swords and staves to take him. But follow Peter to the high-priest's palace, and see the depredations that Satan has made in his soul. See him tremble at the question of one domestic after another, till at last he added blasphemy to baseness, and "began to curse and to swear, saying,

I know not this man of whom ye speak." We are never so weak as when we fancy ourselves to be strong. We must be made to feel that pride becomes us not—that the heart of man is haughty before destruction.

"Before honour is humility." When the sinner passes from a state of impenitence to a state of grace, the whole process will be attended by humility. Before the sinner will turn from his sins, he must be convinced of sin. The Holy Spirit must carry to his heart the conviction that he is exposed to the wrath of God, that he has merited punishment, that he has no means of effecting his escape from the wrath to come. It is this humble estimate of his condition, this willingness to confess himself, with the Apostle, the chief of sinners, that can alone prepare the way for his recovery. Till he has been effectually convinced that he is lost, he will not betake himself to the Saviour. But when he has once been brought to feel that sin has brought him into a state of utter misery, and that unless he obtains forgiveness he

must perish, he will be ready to embrace the cross of Christ, and will thankfully accept the salvation of the Gospel.

And it is not only in the case of the conversion of the open sinner that we trace the certainty of this part of the text. There is no growth in grace, there is no safety, without humility. If we are Christians indeed, if we have received the truth as it is in Jesus, if we are living a life of faith on the Son of God, the index of our advancement is our humility. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The more we know of ourselves, the more cause we shall find for humility. We shall regard ourselves as wretched sinners, rebels against a most gracious Benefactor, spared by his forbearance, pardoned by his free mercy. The richness of his grace has been exhibited by his sparing not his Son, but giving Him up for us all, as a pledge of his readiness with Him to freely give us all things. There was nothing that could have been done for us, which has not been done. And yet when the constraining power of the love of Christ

is felt most strongly, how cold are our affections! how manifold our transgressions! How little are we disposed to deny ourselves! What small exertions do we make for God! How closely do our hearts cleave to the world! We have indeed enough to make us humble. And humility is our security. If we feel our need of God's gracious help, and ardently seek it, help will be afforded. When we are weak, and feel our weakness, then are we strong. He who "scorneth the scorners, giveth grace unto the lowly." "Though the Lord be high," says the Psalmist, "yet hath he respect unto the lowly; but the proud he knoweth afar off." When he distrusts himself, and thinks meanly of himself, the Christian is in the state most favourable for his advancement in faith and holiness. "Before honour is humility;" and, as Eliphaz beautifully says to Job, "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person."

Yes, "before honour is humility." When

humility prevails in our hearts, we have the most certain pledge of the future reward. Humility must prepare us for it. We cannot be in a state to enjoy the presence of God, till the love of God has purified our hearts from pride, till we have been fitted for the employments of heaven. St. John tells us, that the four-and-twenty elders, who represent the patriarchs of the ancient and Christian Israel, "fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Thus the glorified saints may teach us, that before honour, the highest honour that man can enjoy, is *humility*. And, oh! my brethren, may God teach every one of us by his Holy Spirit; may the natural pride of our hearts be removed, may we be enabled to overcome temptation; and having humbly devoted ourselves to God, may we pursue our

course with humility, and watchfulness, and prayer; that we may attain the everlasting glory to which an humble faith uniformly conducts the believer in Jesus!

SERMON XXIII.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

PSALM liii. 1.

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

IN reading the history recorded in the Old Testament, we are sometimes ready to think that the wonderful interpositions of Almighty Power, which were wrought in favour of the children of Israel, must necessarily have deprived that people of their free-agency. We think that unbelief could not hold out against the sensible evidence that was brought to bear against it; that the man who witnessed the evident proofs of God's perfections and providence, could no more doubt that God was the Creator and Preserver, than he could doubt that he

was himself a sentient and living thing; and that it was just as impossible to deny God's existence, as it was to deny his own existence. And so it was. The evidence as addressed to the reason was irresistible. It was God who acted, God must *therefore* be. It was God who spoke, it was therefore quite impossible reasonably to deny that there was a God. But still it seems there were persons, who, in the face of all this, ventured to say in the Psalmist's time, "There is no God;" who denied the providence, perhaps the existence, of an Almighty Author of the universe.

Upon the principles with which we are furnished by the Bible, it is not difficult to account for this. The Psalm which commences with the words of the text, describes the natural condition of our race. "God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Here is a complete explanation of the difficulty.

Instances of obstinate unbelief are not at all astonishing, in a race of which this is the natural character. It is affirmed that, naturally, none "understand, nor do any seek after God." And it is quite to be expected, that those who sink deeper than their fellows in sin, should obstinately reject the belief of a Judge and a retribution, and say in their hearts, and with their lips, as they do say in their lives, that "there is no God."

But how does the Psalmist characterize such persons? What is the *inspired* estimate of these men? They lay claim themselves to unusual strength of mind; it is a matter of high self-congratulation with them that they have been able to shake off the chains of opinion, and to stand up in the proud attitude of intellectual independence. Their character is disposed of by inspiration in a single epithet. It would be too great a compliment to them to brand their notions in a lengthened denunciation; they are not giants, they need not be scathed with the thunderbolt. A word of truth strips them of all their

agnificent pretensions; and there they and for ever shivering in the brief sen- ence, "The *fool* hath said in his heart, here is no God."

It is right easy to establish the Psalmist's verdict, and to evince the absolute folly of those who say there is no God. But the atheist is a monster. He is, to continue the metaphor, not one of a variety, but a misshapen and unformed thing, of occasional and rare occurrence, regarded by all thinking men as a moral curiosity. We must not, therefore, treat the text as denouncing only the atheist. It evidently has in view those who deny the Providence of God. Indeed, in the Psalmist's time, to deny a Providence, was to deny a God. It was reserved for more subtle unbelievers to conceive the notion of a Creator that would not care for his works. The denier of Providence clearly therefore comes within the grasp of the text. It is quite fair to regard it as extending still farther—to those who impugn what the Supreme Being has revealed concerning himself. All who doubt what God has said, must be con-

sidered as denying God; and as coming within the reach of the branding sentence. "The *fool* hath said in his heart, There is no God." May the Author of "every good and every perfect gift, the Father of lights," enlighten our souls, and keep us in the knowledge of all that it concerns us to know concerning himself!

Much has been said, and much disputed, concerning the origin of man's knowledge of God. Certain it is that the belief of a Deity has prevailed universally in every age and every land, among men who have had the slightest pretensions to civilization. There have, it is said, been found some tribes who seem to possess no idea of a God. But then they are in the lowest state of degradation. They may be almost said to have lost every thing which distinguishes man from the brutes, and have sunk very far below the level of the species. In spite of this apparent exception, the rule holds as strongly as ever—that the belief of a Deity is universal. Now without inquiring whether any ever reasoned themselves into this belief, whe-

ther they arrived at a persuasion of the existence of God by an intellectual process, we have a ready and natural way of accounting for the prevalence of this knowledge, upon the highly reasonable supposition that it is derived from primitive tradition. Without supposing that man is able to attain by the use of his own reason the knowledge of God, it seems impossible to deny, that when that knowledge has by any means whatever been conveyed to him, he has within his reach abundant evidence to confirm him in the belief of the truth. He cannot look around him, without seeing the most ample proofs of a Creator. The earth clothed with vegetation, and occupied by innumerable living beings, the waters contributing their full share of usefulness and beauty, and swarming with multitudes of animated inhabitants, the sky hung with the lamps of light, with kindred globes—all bear their part in pouring in evidence of the truth that there is a God—an Almighty, and all-gracious God. "The invisible things of him from the creation

of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead," says St. Paul. And Job says, "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?"

It is quite certain that for every effect there must be a cause—that every thing which bears the marks of contrivance, must have had a contriver. Every thing in nature has evidently been brought into existence with a particular design, to serve a particular purpose. What we see in the natural world *could not* have been produced by chance. It would be more reasonable to believe that the building in which we are assembled was formed by chance; for no work of human art, however elaborate and exquisite, can bear any comparison with the admirable beauty and finish of the works of nature. They are the workmanship of a Creator, infinite

in power, or how could he have created them? infinite in goodness, or why such marked provision for his creatures' happiness? infinite in wisdom, or how could he so completely have compassed the ends of his design? All proves his being and perfections. All proves the folly of a moment's unbelief, and evinces the correctness of the inspired sentence, that it is "the *fool* who says in his heart, There is no God!"

But the words of the text must not be understood as tracing the denial of God to a weakness of intellect. There is no reason to think that there is inability to entertain this truth when it is proposed to the mind, in any case where there is not mental disease or imbecility. No person can stand excused for his unbelief on the plea that his mind was not capacious enough, or not vigorous enough, to receive the truth. It approves itself to minds of every character. The proofs that establish it are invincible by every thing like reasoning. The difficulty is not to believe it, but to reject it. It is rejected,

not by unbelief of the head, but by unbelief of the heart. It is not that the person cannot believe, but that he will not believe. When the Psalmist says that the *fool* says in his heart, There is no God, he does not mean, by a fool, merely a person of weak or perverted intellect; the word he employs refers to the moral state of the person. It might perhaps be correctly rendered "the worthless fellow," the vile, unprincipled man; the man who by gross vice had brought himself into a state of abject moral wretchedness, and who expresses rather his wishes than his convictions when he says, "There is no God."

But it has been already observed that the words of the text apply as distinctly to a denial of the providence, as to a denial of the existence of God. The Scriptures uniformly represent God as the Governor as well as the Creator of the universe—as ordering all things in heaven and earth, as doing all things after the counsel of his own will. A God taking no care of his works would clearly, to the minds of the sacred writers, be no God.

The very idea would to them be a contradiction in terms. The heathens themselves had the same notions of the Deity. All who believed in the various systems of idolatry supposed their gods to take part in the administration of the affairs of the universe. It was infidelity *among them*, to deny a providence; and all who in corrupt times did deny it, were always looked upon and distinguished as atheists. And it is clear that such a denial amply deserves the brand fixed upon it by the text. Its folly is as distinct and evident as is that of the denial of the being of God. The very idea of a Deity includes the persuasion that he will exercise his goodness and power in the preservation of his works. His gracious care for what he has made, is one of the most obvious of his perfections. We may be quite sure that if the universe required a Creator, it stands in need of a Preserver. The natural agencies employed in the present state of things, might soon be expected to involve all in ruin, did not an all-wise Intelligence continue to regulate them. The evil pas-

sions and dispositions of man would soon produce results the most fearful to his race, did not an infinite Being dispose the affairs of this sin-polluted world. And all this is evident. He who runs may read it. It is immediately seen and felt by all who will give themselves the trouble to see and feel. The marks of a Divine Providence stand out to the very first glance of the observer. The events of history, the discoveries of science, and the daily course of life, alike prove that there is a God that judgeth in the earth, that reigneth over all. In vain some deny the divine government, it is "the fool that saith in his heart, There is no God."

We, my brethren, are far from denying the existence of God—we profess to adore and honour him. We deny not the providence of God; on the contrary, we have been calling upon him in prayer, we have been supplicating his continued bounty. Does the text, however, furnish us with no practical lesson? can we find in it, for our own use, no instruction, no warning? This Scripture speaks to us, too, my brethren;

for it is but too certain that, without falling into the enormities of atheism or scepticism, it is not difficult to deny God. We are called upon to believe his existence, not as a mere metaphysical truth, but as a truth in which we are most deeply interested. It is not proposed to us as a point of science, but as an article of faith. We are required not simply to give our assent to it, but to receive and adopt it, as a great principle of action. To all who are addressed by revelation, there is proposed a clear and distinct conception of the Divine character. So much of the Divine nature is discovered, as it is necessary for man to know, and there is an ample display of the various perfections of God. And this information is given us not to debate about, but to believe. To doubt what God says of himself, is to deny God. When we have once acknowledged the Bible to be a revelation, we are bound to receive all it teaches. And to reject any part of its Testimony, is to partake of the folly of those who say, "There is no God."

God reveals himself to us in his word,

as the Creator and Preserver of all things, and as such we are required to exercise towards him a sense of dependence—to worship him, and to serve him. Again, he reveals himself as possessed of every perfection—as Almighty, so that none can resist his will; as of infinite goodness, so that his mercy endureth for ever; as of infinite wisdom, so that he is light, and in him is no darkness at all; as of infinite justice, so that he "is righteous in all his works which he doeth." We can entertain no doubt about the relation in which we stand to God, or about the revealed attributes of God, without denying him, and laying ourselves open to the force of the declaration, "The *fool* hath said in his heart, There is no God."

Nothing is more certain than that "all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." We have violated the Divine law, however communicated — every mouth must be stopped, and all the world stands guilty before God. This, our ruined state, places us in a fresh set of relations to God. God

has regarded us with pity in this state. As the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, he has effected a plan of salvation. The Father sent the Son into the world to save sinners. The Son assumed our nature, and in our nature wrought out salvation for us. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, prepares the soul to desire and to embrace the great salvation of the Gospel. It is in this character, God is revealed to us in the Bible—we are called upon to believe him as the God of redemption. His abstract perfections engage him to punish sin. There is no comfort for the sinner, but in that view of the Divine character which represents God as reconciling his various attributes, so as to be just, and yet the justifier of the believer. If we would, as sinners, find mercy in God, we must seek it in the scriptural view of the character of God. To regard God in any other character, will be to find him a consuming fire; and, as far as any reasonable hope of safety is concerned, we might as well say with the fool, "There is no God."

And let us remember, my brethren, th
it does not need an open and solemn avow
of unbelief, to constitute a denial of Go
He is as much a fool who denies God i
his heart, as he who denies him with h
lips. The sacred writer chooses the ca
of the unavowed denial. "The fool ha
said in his heart, There is no God." A
thought brings us under the charge, as di
tinctly as an open declaration. A proc
feeling of independence, a contempt fo
the promises, a forgetfulness of the Divi
presence, a carelessness about our respons
bility, will make us deniers of God. An
where are those of us who have not ente
tained, yea, and cherished these feeling
and so virtually said in our hearts there i
no God? Which of us is not constraine
to confess, "I am the man?" And how ca
we resist the feelings of conscious guil
that spring up on examination of th
sentence—"The fool hath said in his hear
There is no God?"

Let us not resist these convictions. Ma
the Spirit of God rather press them hom
upon us, and make us feel that in th

plainest and most necessary duties we have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. On whatever point we examine ourselves, we shall find ourselves to be unprofitable servants. We revolt from the very idea of denying God, and yet the most casual self-examination must convince us, that we have continually in thought and deed fallen into a virtual denial of him. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" May the conviction of our sinfulness be made to every one of us a conviction of our need of a Saviour! And, satisfied that of ourselves we can do nothing, may we avail ourselves of the perfect work of Him who died for us!

A careful examination of this subject tends to convince of sin. My brethren, it also supplies us with a powerful motive for gratitude. God has kept us from an open denial of him. We have hitherto been preserved from that miserable folly. We are publicly acknowledging him. We are, by assembling in this place, professing to believe what the fool denies. "By the

grace of God we are what we are." If
are habitually worshipping him in spi
and in truth, great indeed must be
gratitude, that he has of his free gra
caused us to differ from a world that lie
in wickedness: we must feel his love co
straining us to devote to him our bo
and our spirit which are his. Our gra
tude is due for outward privileges. Bu
oh! may we never be satisfied with mere
drawing nigh to God with our mouth, a
honouring him with our lips, while o
heart is far from him!

SERMON XXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN CONTEST.

1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

I HAVE taken the whole of this passage as my text, not as intending to enter upon a minute exposition, or at all expecting even to notice all its parts, in the short time it is my practice to address you; but as wishing to bring out the leading ideas of the

Apostle, who, it is not too much to say, does in this place lay before us one of the most striking illustrations of the Christian life which is to be found in the whole compass of the sacred volume.

The attentive reader of the Scriptures continually meets with internal evidence of the truth of the book which is the object of his study, much more than strong enough to silence the objections suggested by the Tempter, and the doubts that are the spontaneous growth of an evil heart of unbelief. The least educated person, who is reading the sacred book with an honest mind and a spirit of prayer, from time to time meets with, and observes, the most satisfactory proofs that he is perusing the word of God. But the greater our acquaintance with human learning, the more frequently shall we meet with, and the better shall we be able to appreciate, the particular kind of evidence to which I now refer. The various books of the New Testament profess to have been written at a certain period, within the half century which followed the crucifixion of Jesus.

We have extensive means of knowing the state of the world at that particular period. We have large remains of the literatures of the most civilized nations; we have a great mass of historical information; the geographical divisions are well ascertained, and the study of antiquities, which has been so zealously cultivated, has brought within the reach of the scholar an acquaintance with the most minute details of private life. The New Testament has been submitted to the test of this accumulated knowledge, and the application has but tended to establish its claims. When any of its books are critically examined, they are found to be just what, if we suppose they were written at the period to which they are assigned, and by the persons to whom they are ascribed, *they must have been.* The circumstances of time, and place, and allusion, and language, all bear the same testimony; and many of these circumstances have been remarked, so minute and delicate, that it is quite safe to assert that they *could* not have occurred in the composition of a writer who was

writing in an assumed character, or in a different age. And the argument which proceeds upon these circumstances has ever been felt to be most powerful by those whose habits and turn of mind have disposed them to inquiry and research.

I have been led to notice this branch of the Christian evidence, by the illustration of the character of the Christian's conduct which is employed by St. Paul in the passage which I have read as the text. He is writing to the Corinthians, and in explaining to them the principles which actuated his conduct, he has recourse for illustration to the feelings and practices of those who contended in the Grecian games. The parallel he institutes between the exercises and efforts of those who sought the prizes of strength and speed, and the moral discipline and spiritual combats in which the Christian is prepared and strives for the reward of immortality, is exquisitely beautiful and strikingly accurate. But it is more—it was finely calculated to affect the persons to whom it was addressed. The Corinthians were quite familiar with these

games. From a very remote antiquity the Isthmian games, one of the most famous of these national solemnities, had been celebrated in their immediate neighbourhood, and under their own direction and management. When the Roman supremacy had extended into Greece, a cruel policy had utterly destroyed their city, because Corinth had vainly endeavoured to support the cause of Grecian independence. Under favouring circumstances it had risen from its ruins, and resumed its rank among the most flourishing cities of the age. There was no circumstance that had tended more to effect its restoration than the existence of these games, which rendered it, during the time of their celebration, the resort of numerous visitors. We readily see, therefore, the appropriateness of St. Paul's illustration; and while we admire the original application, we cannot be too thankful to the God of the Bible, that he has caused to stand out before us in these wonderful coincidences the plain evidences of its truth.

In the passage before us, St. Paul re-

marks, *first*, the points of resemblance, and *secondly*, the points of dissimilarity, between the conduct and expectations of the Christian, and those of the competitor in the Grecian games.

There are, probably, few of us who have not some acquaintance with the particular practices from which the Apostle derives his illustration. But as it is quite impossible to understand his observations without having a correct notion of the customs to which he alludes, it will be proper to make them the subject, at all events, of a brief notice. Among the public amusements of the Greeks, the most conspicuous were those great assemblies which were holden at fixed intervals and certain places, for the display of bodily strength and activity. The favourite exhibitions were the foot-race, and the exercises of wrestling and boxing. They were celebrated in honour of some particular deity; and the interest with which they were regarded was so great and general, that the more famous of these games were attended, not only by the inhabitants of the

neighbouring cities, but by Greeks from the most remote parts of the country, and by strangers from foreign lands. The candidates for victory thus contended in the sight of great multitudes of their countrymen, and the conquerors were honoured with the applauses of admiring thousands. But honour was for the most part their sole reward,—the prize was but a chaplet: the victor in the Isthmian games was crowned with a wreath of parsley; and the only visible recompense of his toils was but a poor weed.

The gloom of antiquity, and the charms of poetry, have combined to soften what was unseemly, and to bring into relief what was graceful and pleasing, in these festive celebrations of ancient Greece. But as we have had occasion to speak of them, we must not omit to observe that they were strongly marked with the melancholy peculiarities of the Pagan systems. There is something beautiful in the absence of sordid motives, and in the display of generous emulation; but we must not allow ourselves to be misled into the notion

that anything pure or elevated is to be found apart from the love of God. And, in spite of what is at first sight noble and admirable in these Grecian festivals, there is every reason to believe that there was nothing in the national customs which had a more pernicious effect on the national morals, or had a more direct tendency to produce a general licentiousness, and to foster the national vices. At all events, we are not for a moment to suppose that St. Paul, by borrowing an illustration from a subject with which his Corinthian friends must have been so familiar, intended to give countenance to such amusements. They were an act of heathen worship—they were always celebrated in honour of some false deity; and a Christian could no more be present at these games, than he could join in sacrificing in a heathen temple. And there were other considerations that would weigh with him. Even if it had not been an act of apostasy to be present, as a Christian he could not have been present at a vain and sinful show. The man who "keeps under

his body, and brings it into subjection," will be little disposed to throw himself into temptation, by gazing upon a scene where there is nothing to aid him in getting the mastery over his evil passions, and where everything is calculated to withdraw his thoughts and affections from God. Oh, my brethren! if we have set our affections on the things above, we shall have no taste for the pomps and vanities of the world; and if there were nothing but thin, cold, and heartless worldliness, in what are called public amusements, *that* of itself would be enough to make the Christian think of them in pity and in sorrow. When St. Paul illustrates his experience by a reference to the Isthmian games, he no more intends to express his approbation, than he does when he alludes to the bloody massacres of the Roman amphitheatre, or than he means to encourage war when he borrows comparisons from the conduct and equipment of the soldier. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may

obtain?" In a race in which there were many competitors, all fired with the greatest anxiety to conquer, he who hoped to prevail must have put forth all his energies, and persevered till the last instant of the contest. All would run, though one only would be crowned. In the Christian course, though many are called, few will be chosen. The Lord's exhortation is, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." In a community, which has adopted the profession of Christianity, there will be a small number who will obtain that which all profess to desire. Unless we are very much in advance of the mass of those around us, we can have no reasonable expectation of gaining the prize. In the exertions of those who sought to prevail in the foot-race, we have an example well worthy of our imitation in the course of life. The difficulty of success did not deter them from the contest; it did but stimulate their zeal, and lead them to increase their efforts. In running the race set before us, it becomes us "so to run,

that we may obtain." It will be vain to have assumed the character of competitors, unless we eagerly exert ourselves to gain success. Disgrace and disappointment only await us, unless we strain every nerve to prevail.

By referring to the race, the Apostle enforces the general duty of exertion in the Christian; in referring to another of the games, he points out the particular way in which the Christian should seek success: "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." Those who intended to contend in the public games were obliged, for many months before the time of their celebration, to observe a particular regimen, and to practise particular exercises. They would have no chance of success, but by observing a certain course of discipline; indeed, none were admitted to the competition, but such as had submitted to the prescribed rules. We readily see the application of the comparison. We bear about with us a body of sin; and even when our hearts have been fired with a holy desire of the crown

of glory—when the grace of God has led us to strive for mastery over the enemies of our souls, unless we systematically attempt to obtain the command over our passions and affections, by bringing them into discipline, we have small prospect of success. St. Paul says, that he "kept under his body, and brought it into subjection; lest that by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway." Certain as he was of the love of Christ, which had been in such a remarkable manner extended to him, he found it absolutely necessary to employ every possible way of establishing that superiority over the evil dispositions of his nature, which the grace of God had given him. He knew well the only source of salvation. It had been his great object, ever since his conversion, to point to the Lord Jesus as the Saviour of the sinner; and to assert that all who would be justified, can be justified only by faith in him. But he knew, and ever asserted, that a lively faith must be productive of holiness; and that when a man who has acted upon

Christian principles, has fallen from holiness, he has most assuredly fallen from grace. If one, who, like the Apostle, had enjoyed such clear manifestations of the Divine favour, deemed it necessary to pursue a course of discipline severe as that of the Grecian combatants, we must readily perceive that it is necessary for us to avoid every temptation which can be avoided, and to abstain from every indulgence that would make it more difficult for us to attain the great object for which we live. My brethren, let us not leave this part of our subject, without inquiring whether we are imitating the Apostle; whether we have, like the ancient combatants, thrown our whole souls into our object; and are, to the neglect of every thing that might impede our progress, "pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

The Christian resembles the Grecian combatant in his moderation, in his earnestness, in his perseverance. He differs from him in being sure of victory, and in having in view an infinitely better reward. "I

therefore so run, not as uncertainly; ... fight I, not as one that beateth the air. ... They do it to obtain a corruptible crown ... but we an incorruptible." Whatever pain ... the competitor in the games had taken, he ... was not sure of victory. An adversary ... might still be superior to him in strength ... or activity, or skill. If he ran, another ... might reach the goal before him. If he ... fought, the dexterity of his opponent might ... avoid his strokes, and his blows might be ... wasted on the air. It is not thus with the ... Christian—there is nothing uncertain about ... the event of *his* exertions. With the love ... of God in his heart, supported by faith in ... the promises of his Saviour, he strives with ... the assurance of success. It is not in his ... own strength he contends. If he trusts ... for a moment to himself, he will be made ... to feel his weakness. But he can do all ... things through Christ strengthening him. ... His Redeemer can enable him to attain ... the reward which he has purchased. If ... he trusts to him, he *will* enable him. He ... runs not as uncertainly, nor yet does he ... fight as one that beateth the air. He ...

exertions are not lost. His prayers, and faith, and patience, and labours, are not in vain. He, whose grace is working in him, is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love. The reward is certain—and what a reward! The Greeks were encouraged by the hope of gaining a corruptible crown, a poor wreath, which received its value from being the pledge of the applause of their fellow-mortals. The Christian will obtain a crown incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for him in heaven. An everlasting inheritance will be the recompense of his reward—a state of enjoyment fuller and more perfect than he can now conceive. His crown will be the welcome, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." My brethren, may the thought of the Christian's privileges and the Christian's portion make us all anxious to share the one, and to attain to the blessed hope of the other. We must all, however, enter the course, and strive in the contest, before we can gain the victory. And this contest is

still a reality. We must devote to it every energy. If we would engage in it, we must avoid everything that would distract, or impede, or encumber us; and put ourselves under the discipline which is prescribed to all who would strive lawfully. If we begin our efforts in prayer and humility, depending on the Saviour, and looking for the aid of the Holy Spirit, we need not fear for the issue. If God be for us, who can be against us? He can enable us to build on the right foundation, to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, and to "hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

SERMON XXV.

THE HEALING VIRTUE OF THE SAVIOUR.

ST. LUKE vi. 19.

"The whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."

THE passage in immediate connexion with these words, sets before us a transaction of the utmost importance in the history of the Church: it is the institution of the Christian ministry; the first constitution of an order of men, which God has been pleased visibly to continue from that time to the present, to promote his purposes of mercy. The circumstances which preceded and followed it, are highly calculated to display its importance. "It came to pass

in those days," says the Evangelist, "that Jesus went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." Several instances are recorded in which our blessed Lord engaged in prayer. But there is no other occasion noticed by the sacred writers in which he spent so long a space of time in uninterrupted prayer. After a night devoted to this solemn employment, "when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." The appointment of these first ministers of the Gospel was signalised by an extraordinary display of our Lord's miraculous powers. "And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him; for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."

The miracles of our Lord were evidently intended, and they would seem completely calculated, to beat down every refuge of infidelity. He exerted a control over the powers and elements of nature; "the wind and the sea obeyed him." He walked upon the water; he passed unseen through a multitude; he healed all manner of diseases; he communicated to others the wonderful powers which he so largely exercised himself. By the number, variety, and publicity of his miracles, he removed from the minds of those that witnessed them all suspicion of imposture, and drove his inveterate enemies to adopt the wild and senseless opinion, that he wrought his mighty works by the assistance of Beelzebub. It is very remarkable, that in the simple and artless narrations of the Evangelists, there is not the slightest allusion that can lead us to think that any who witnessed our Lord's miracles doubted them to be real miracles. It is very plain that the eye-witnesses could form no second opinion about the matter. It was utterly impossible for them to doubt that notable

miracles were done in their sight. Hence it is, that our Lord denounces, in terms of such uncommon severity, the sin of those who ascribed them to evil spirits. To doubt their reality was impossible; to impute them to diabolical agency, was to cut oneself off from every means of conviction —it was to commit the sin against the Holy Ghost.

The revelation which God had made of himself to the people of Israel had been introduced and supported by repeated miracles. The Divine commission of Moses had been attested by signs and wonders, which induced a reluctant people to receive his laws; and several of the prophets, who in various parts of the history of the chosen race addressed them with messages from God, were invested with the power of working miracles in confirmation of the authority they exercised, and in support of the truths they taught. The miracles thus wrought under the old dispensation had loudly proclaimed the power and wisdom of God. The holy men by whose ministry they were performed, never

forgot to acknowledge the source of their more than human powers, and to point to Jehovah as the great Agent of all they did. But the new dispensation was introduced by one far greater in nature and in powers, than the prophets of the former covenant; by the Word become flesh—himself God, blessed for ever. He did what he did, of his own authority, and by his own power. And while the prophets before him acted in the name of Jehovah, and his disciples after him acted in the name of the Lord, he dispensed with the laws of nature as the Creator and Arbiter of nature, and spoke and acted as nature's God.

It was to be expected that Deity, when veiled "in the form of a servant, and made in the likeness of men," should have its presence indicated by the loud testimony of creation. And, accordingly, we find that all his works confessed the presence of "God manifest in the flesh." He performed miracles by a touch, by a word, by the mere exercise of his will. The body which he had, to effect the purposes of his

mediatorial work, taken into union with his Divine nature, was invested with so sacred a character, that as many as touched him, depending on his power, were made perfectly whole; and it was in consequence of their knowledge of the existence of this wonderful power, that, on the occasion noticed in the text, "the whole multitude sought to touch him; for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."

It would be interesting to inquire into the proof which the miracles of our Lord afford to the divinity of his person, and to show the distinction between his miracles, and those of his first disciples, which most nearly resembled them. But it will perhaps be more profitable to employ the text upon a different object, and attempt to show in illustration of it, that if we "seek to apprehend him as our Saviour, there still goes forth a virtue from him, which can heal us all."

The work of salvation evidently implies, in the first place, certain wants and certain feelings on the part of the sinner; and, in the second place, certain powers on the

part of the Saviour. We may notice these two subjects, while we examine the two clauses of the text. And first,

I. "The whole multitude sought to touch him." The fame of our Lord's miracles had drawn together a very large assembly. Some of these persons had come to hear so gifted a teacher, others had come to be healed of their diseases. The words before us evidently apply to this latter class. They must have been very numerous, for they are called a multitude. "The whole multitude of sick persons sought to touch him." Now before a sick person will apply for relief, he must be conscious of being sick. The poor sufferers who crowded round our Lord, were painfully conscious of their misery. Afflicted with the various ills to which humanity is subject, they were too grievously weighed down by their wretched condition not to feel and acknowledge it. Let us pause a moment on this point, my brethren. Sin is a disease, a dire disease. A disease more grievous, more loathsome, than any that brought these sufferers to the feet of

Jesus. We are all of us affected by it. It is the withering plague that, unless it be stayed, must work the ruin of our souls. Before we can be healed, we must perceive and feel its virulence. We must acknowledge that, by nature and by practice, we are miserable sinners; that in us there dwelleth no good thing; that we have grievously offended God, and justly incurred his heavy displeasure; and that we have in ourselves no means of recovering his favour. It is not till we are thus practically persuaded of our soul's disease, that we shall apply to the great Physician.

But the multitude spoken of in the text, must not only have been deeply conscious of their need of help, they must also have felt the pressing necessity of bestirring themselves to procure it. They were not in a condition with which they were disposed to rest satisfied. The very instinct of self-preservation urged them to seek relief from their pressing misery. Till they could obtain a cure, there was nothing for them but pain, and discomfort, and the prospect of speedy death. They eagerly

desired to have their condition improved. They anxiously looked about them for help. Some of them had come from very remote situations. They were eagerly desirous of relief—they immediately repaired to the quarter whence it was to be expected. And these must be our feelings with regard to our spiritual maladies. We must not only be awake to our danger, we must be anxiously desirous of escaping it. We must thirst for pardon, and newness of life. It is not general professions of our guilt and misery that will alone avail us: we must feel the burden of sin to be intolerable. A sense of our wretched condition as sinners, must drive us to such a remedy. There is no sincere conviction of sin, that will allow us to remain satisfied in a state of unforgiven sin. If our convictions are the works of Divine grace, they will make us restless and miserable till we have found effectual relief.

The afflicted "multitude" in the text, "sought to touch him." The general report had spread far and wide the fame of our Lord's miracles. The sick persons here

introduced to us, bending under the weight of their misery, and desirous of relief, had come from their homes to seek, what, they had been led to believe, would prove a certain remedy. It was clearly known to them that they had but to touch the Saviour, believing on his power to restore them, and they would be healed. They were evidently convinced of his power to restore them to health. They had not come so far from their homes on a mere experiment. They were fully persuaded that the wonderful Person to whom they applied, was invested with the most ample power to do "unto them according to their will." Here, too, the parallel holds. The convinced and inquiring sinner must seek to apprehend the Saviour. He feels his wretchedness, he desires forgiveness: the fame of Jesus is spread abroad—he must come to him for relief. To the question of the wounded conscience, "What must I do to be saved?" the Gospel loudly and plainly proclaims the heaven-sent answer—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." We must receive this testi-

mony of the word of God. We must come in faith to him who bears the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Feeling our own guilt and misery, and desirous of accepting salvation on God's own terms, we must seek to receive it through Him who is set forth to us as the way, the truth, and life.

Let this then suffice for a notice of the wants and feelings of the sinner; let us now turn our attention to the power of the Saviour. "There went virtue out of him and healed them all." The multitude of sick who applied to him, looked for the exercise of this wonderful power. It was a belief of its existence that prompted their application. The words are, "The whole multitude sought to touch him; for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all." They believed, and their faith was not vain. He to whom they applied, never rejected the faithful applicant for his mercy. According to their faith it was done unto them. They were loosed of their infirmities. The power on which they depended for relief, "healed them all."

The power which our blessed Lord, during his personal ministry, exercised in the healing of bodily diseases, was but an emblem of the power he still exercises as the Saviour of sinners. "Him God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." "Through him is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins." "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." And "he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." Sin has exposed us to eternal death. We have not in ourselves the means of averting that righteous penalty. We are utterly unable to ward off the stroke of justice that impends over us. The Saviour bore it for us. He endured the infliction of Divine wrath, that man's sins had merited, and he is willing to dispense to us the pardon which by his life and suffering he purchased. His precious blood, shed upon the cross for our redemption, effected a complete salvation, and he is ready to dispense to all of us the benefits of his

mediatorial work. If, my brethren, we feel the guilt and danger of sin, if we desire pardon, with this blessed Jesus is the fulness of grace, there still proceeds a virtue from him, which may heal us all.

But if we have been effectually convinced of sin, we shall not only desire forgiveness, we shall desire holiness. Sin will appear to us to be, as it is, exceeding sinful; hateful to God, ruinous to our souls. We shall remember that it is committed in defiance of the gracious Being who has preserved and blessed us; against the merciful Saviour who lived and died in our nature to redeem us; and we shall eagerly aspire to "be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Here too, there is power in the Saviour. There goes forth a virtue from him to heal us all. Let us put our cause in his hands, and we must be safe. It has been part of his work to provide the powerful aid of his Holy Spirit, to enable us to struggle with our natural corruption, and finally to prevail over the enemies of our souls. What

he has done for *us* supplies us with the most powerful motive to do all we can for him. And thus it may most truly be said, that in whatever point of view our relation to him is considered, "there goes out of him a virtue to heal us all."

And now in conclusion, let me ask you, what benefit have you derived from the Saviour? Have you applied to him for the pardon of your sins, for grace to enable you to live to his service? Have you been brought to feel your sins, to regard them in their true character, to desire forgiveness, to follow after holiness? My brethren, it is quite needless to remark, that your condition is very miserable, unless you have entertained these feelings—unless the work of grace has begun in your souls. If it has, may it bring you to the Saviour! In his mediatorial character he is still among us, and we may rest satisfied, that for those who seek to touch him, or to share in the benefits of his work, there still goes virtue out of him to heal them all.

SERMON XXVI.

THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.

1 KINGS xiii. 21, 22.

"And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drank water in the place of which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers."

THE Apostle tells us, that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." And it is quite easy to justify all the latitude of the assertion. The circumstances that would at first sight

appear the most peculiar and extraordinary in the word of God, will upon examination often be found to convey most important general truths and principles. The narrative to which the words I have just read belong, brings before us a very singular state of things and a very remarkable history; yet it is highly calculated to teach us many a valuable lesson. The mangled corpse of the disobedient prophet suggests a variety of particulars that well deserve attentive examination. May God give us ears to hear, and hearts to understand, this portion of his word!

It is likely that we are most of us pretty familiar with the story of this prophet. It is annually read in the Church, and is withal so interesting, and related in a style so graphic by the sacred historian, that it is not easily forgotten. It will however be necessary to trace its particulars. It opens very abruptly. "And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense." These simple words present us

with a very remarkable picture—"A man of God," coming with a Divine commission, or "by the word of the Lord," to schismatical Bethel. We know nothing of this prophet but what is told us in this chapter; we do not even know his name. It is quite uncertain whether he had ever been employed as a prophet before, or if he had, whether he had long borne the prophetical character. But there he is, sustaining the highest character that man can sustain—he is a delegate from God, he bears a message from heaven. But there is a second figure in the piece. Jeroboam stands by the altar to burn incense. The rebel has become a schismatic, and there he is, actually engaged in mocking God with his sacrilegious offerings.

But let us notice for a moment the state of things under which this prophet appears at Bethel. The misconduct of Solomon had produced disaffection among his subjects. The imprudence of his son and successor Rehoboam had brought on a crisis, and ten of the twelve tribes threw off their allegiance to the house of David. Jero-

boam, who had been the leader of the rebellion, became the king of the revolted tribes. To retain the kingdom he had thus acquired, he endeavoured to break off all intercourse between his subjects and those of their countrymen who remained faithful to Rehoboam. "He said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan." The people generally acquiesced in his scheme. Instead of frequenting the house of God at Jerusalem, they now worshipped in the temples built by Jeroboam. He did not leave his plan imperfect. He ap-

pointed festivals, and established a priesthood; and (as it would seem) to give a dignity to his ordinances, exercised himself the sacerdotal character.

The separation of the ten tribes from the remaining part of the nation had doubtless been predicted: it was intended to punish the miserable idolatry of Solomon, and the folly of his imprudent son. But that does not at all affect the conduct of the persons who brought it about; and the disaffection of the Israelites and the treason of their leader are recorded as a warning to all who would wish to be taught of God. What they did was not done, could not have been, in the fear of God, and accordingly it did not have the Divine blessing. It led to still more open and dangerous sin. We have just seen the course Jeroboam was led to pursue. He acted entirely upon a worldly policy. He naturally enough desired to retain what he had acquired. He does not scruple about the means he shall employ to effect his object. God had chosen Jerusalem to be the seat of his worship. He

had made it the metropolis of the religion of Israel. There he had manifested himself by a visible symbol. There was the place where his honour dwelled. There was no point in the Mosaic institutes more distinctly laid down than that the priesthood and service of the altar should be confined to the tribe of Levi, and that it was a forbidden thing for any other Israelite to have aught to do with the ceremonial worship. But it is impolitic to allow these peculiarities; it may tend to break down the separation in government. And Jeroboam cares not for other considerations, and hurries his subjects into open schism. As a politician he acted prudently. If a godless expediency may ever have place, it was never perhaps more necessary. A periodical resort to Jerusalem compromised the independence of his kingdom. And when the Priests and Levites had been obliged to abandon his dominions, he could not get his altars served but by people of the other tribes. But nothing can justify disobedience to the Divine commands. All this had been

forbidden, and therefore it was unlawful. His conduct was the effect of unbelief, and it led to ruin.

It was in this state of things that the man of God, referred to in the text, appeared at Bethel. "He cried against the altar in the word of the Lord." The presence of Jeroboam does not daunt him in the exercise of his commission. He was the servant and messenger of Jehovah. He denounces against the schismatical worship of the place a future judgment. He foretels the destruction of that unlawful altar by Josiah, and declares that it should then be rent, in proof of the certainty of what he predicted. An animated and striking scene ensued. Jeroboam, provoked at the insult offered to his laws and person, interrupted his sacrifice to punish this unwelcome visitor. "He put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man

of God had given by the word of the Lord." Overpowered by this manifest interposition of Heaven, Jeroboam now applied in the language of entreaty to the man whom he but late attempted to make the victim of his tyranny. And the king said unto the man of God, "Intreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before."

But this remarkable transaction seems to have made little impression on the mind of Jeroboam. The words he addressed to the prophet paint his character. We find in them not the slightest trace of recognition of the providence of God, or the least feeling for the real dignity of man. Even with regard to what had happened, he cannot look higher than the human instrument, nor can he believe that any one would act upon any nobler motive than the love of gain. We see all the manners of the worldly politician when we read, that he "said to the man of God, Come

home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward."

The prophet, however, had not feared Jeroboam's frown, and he cared not for his favours. He had been sent to Bethel on a particular errand, and he might not tarry in the polluted land longer than it was absolutely necessary for him to execute his commission. He "said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest." It formed part of the conditions of his commission that it should be performed without delay. God who had sent him, commanded his immediate return. "So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel."

Hitherto his conduct has been such as we may well imitate. He has been placed in trying circumstances, and has passed through them nobly. He was probably

a bold man, and he was not therefore awed by the violence of Jeroboam. He seems to have been a disinterested man, and was not seduced by his offers of reward. He was next to encounter a temptation of a different kind. And the result will show how possible it is to be doing "what is right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart;" how practicable it is to make a show in religion, without acting in all things upon a right principle.

The sacred writer goes on to tell us, that an old prophet who dwelt at Bethel, upon being informed of what had taken place, rode after "the man of God that came from Judah," and upon finding him, invited him "to go home with him and eat bread." He however refused, alleging as he had done to Jeroboam, that "it was said to him by the word of the Lord, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest." We can readily understand the motives which induced the old prophet to go in search of the man

of God. It was quite natural for him to be anxious to extend to him the duties of hospitality. It was much to his honour that he was desirous of entertaining a stranger who had by his faithfulness exposed himself to the vengeance of a powerful prince. But it is not easy to explain or to understand the line of conduct which he pursued in order to induce him to become his guest. "He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread, and drink water. But he lied unto him." That one who had been employed as a messenger of God, and who really seems not to have been devoid of principle, should thus employ, not only falsehood, but sacrilegious falsehood, just to have an opportunity of doing an office of kindness, is, I say, a fact which it is not easy to understand. But though he was a prophet, it did not necessarily follow that he was a holy man. Balaam was employed as a prophet too. And we may remember that this old man lived

at Bethel, among a degenerate and disobedient people. The society with which men associate has an immense influence on their moral principles. The examples he witnessed around him abundantly tended, doubtless, to abate his regard for what was true, and his reverence for what was sacred.

But it is melancholy to find the success of his deceit. We have hitherto had to admire the resolution and firmness of the prophet that came from Judah, we have now to deplore his fall and his punishment. Though he had been undaunted by the frown, and unseduced by the blandishments of an unprincipled tyrant, he was not proof against this new form of temptation. He allowed himself to be deceived. Though he had had the strongest possible proof of what God would have him to do, his faith in what had been told him was not strong enough to resist the kind of influence which was now brought to bear against it. His bold and generous disposition—for that seems to have been his character—laid him open to such a tempta-

tion. He did not suspect fraud—he fell into the snare with unthinking confidence. But that did not lessen the sinfulness of disobedience. God had plainly spoken—he knew what he had commanded. This miserable old man fabricated a story to deceive him. In yielding to his influence, he showed that he believed man more than God. "And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back: and he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." The threatened punishment was soon inflicted. "When he was gone, a lion met him by the way and slew him." And his deceiver "laid his carcase in his own grave."

Such, my brethren, are the consequences of unbelief,—such the danger incurred by disobeying the plain word of God. It is not difficult to find circumstances that seem to palliate the conduct of the disobedient prophet. And I know that it is the history often referred to, even by those who think with reverence of the Bible, as an instance of remarkable severity. But the crime was an aggravated one — this man had enjoyed the highest possible kind of proof of God's will. He had disregarded it. And we cannot help seeing that, in the state of things then prevailing in Israel, his punishment was called for as a warning of the danger of transgression.

But we are not to judge of God's dealings—we are to profit by them. And we see in this history a striking proof of the *necessity of acting in simple obedience to the declared will of God.* When God has made his will known to us, we have but one course to take. We must not venture to trifle—we must not presume to doubt. God requires our confidence,

Without faith we cannot please him. It is but mocking, to address him as "our Father," till we come to him as children, ready to give up ourselves implicitly to his protection and guidance. It is our business, by patient study and diligent inquiry and persevering prayer, to make ourselves acquainted with his will. And then we must receive it in its obvious meaning. When we have got the Bible in our hands, and satisfied ourselves, as we readily may, that it is the word of God, all we have to do is to receive its testimony, and act upon it. We are to receive what it tells us of ourselves, and what it tells us of the way of salvation. And though it may sometimes set before us what we cannot comprehend, though it may sometimes prescribe a line of conduct that does not exactly correspond with what we should have expected; still we have but one course—unshaken faith, implicit obedience.

The history we have been examining warns us of the *danger we incur in depending on others as to what relates to our salva-*

tion. We must every one act for himself in what concerns our immortal souls. If we allow ourselves to be deceived, it is we ourselves who incur the terrible consequences. It will not avail us, when our doom has once been sealed, to urge that we were seduced by the eloquence of one, or the sophistry of another—by the reasoning of the philosopher, or the ridicule of the wit, or the example of the profligate. We have the word of God to teach us; why do we listen to other instruction? We have the Church which adopted us and nourished us, still affectionately lavishing upon us her choicest privileges; what have we to do with any other teaching? When we can once say in any thing—"It has been said to me by the word of the Lord," we have that which ought to fortify us against the most plausible story or argument that ever fell from man's lips. I am not contending for what is called the right of private judgment. I would rather warn you against a dangerous unmeaning phrase, which seems to have been, for some ages past, Satan's

especial engine for the destruction of souls. But I would solemnly urge you to be fully persuaded in your own minds —to seek by instant prayer to be taught of God. And when you are established in the truth as it is in Jesus, in the faith once delivered to the saints, we may trust that you will not be seduced by a lying tongue. Though the falsehood come in disguise—though the wolf come in sheep's clothing—you will say, "It has been said to me by the word of the Lord. — I will not go with thee, neither will I eat bread, nor drink water in this place." You will not allow yourselves to be cheated into ruin.

In conclusion, there is one thing that cannot but strike us. Jeroboam is allowed to go on sinning. The prophet from Judah is cut down in his sin. He may have repented, but the narrative gives us no warrant to say he repented. When the denunciation was uttered against him, it may have come with a blessing. But at all events the punishment was inflicted. There he lies a corpse. He who lately

stood in the presence of Israel as the herald of Jehovah, nobly daring to deliver his message, is now the prey of a lion. But this is the ordinary course of God's dealings; where much is given, much is required. Unbelief and disobedience may not be tolerated in a man of God. My brethren, that is a solemn sentence, which says that "judgment must begin at the house of God." Our privileges increase our responsibility. We have the word of God, and the sacraments. Oh, may God keep us from falling! May He keep us from self-dependence! May He work in us effectually by his Holy Spirit, so that we may alike overcome the wiles and the malice of our spiritual enemies, and "run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

SERMON XXVII.

CHRISTIAN CAUTION.

St. Matthew x. 17

"Beware of men."

The rapid spread of Christianity has always been regarded, and justly regarded, as one of the strongest evidences of its Divine origin. It gratified no passions, it fell in with no prejudices, it was supported by no authority. We may truly say, that it had no human considerations in its favour. On the contrary, it had *many* things against it. To the self-righteous Jew, and the licentious Gentile, it was alike "without form and comeliness;" to the one as recommending humility, to the other as insisting upon holiness. All, too,

must have been shocked by its proposing for their belief a suffering Messiah, and all would naturally examine with more than ordinary circumspection the claims of a system, which could not be received without exposing those who received it to persecution and ridicule. The establishment of the Gospel under such circumstances was evidently "the Lord's doing." The grain of mustard seed grew into a tree, which offered the birds of the air a shelter in its branches; and, thanks to the gracious Husbandman, it still waves in all the gracefulness of luxuriant vegetation! It has experienced the vicissitudes of many a changing year. The cold of winter has haply sometimes chilled it, and the heat and drought of summer have sometimes caused it to droop in languor. A more genial season has revived it. The refreshing showers have awakened it to new life and vigour; and, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, the Church is among us as a goodly tree, casting a noble shadow, yielding its proper fruit, and, like that still more noble tree which was shown in vision

to the prophet-evangelist, producing "leaves for the healing of the nations."

The Church is a tree rooted in the promises of God. It is a house founded upon a rock. The God of truth engaged that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. That promise explains to us its establishment, it accounts for its continuance, and it forbids us to fear its ruin. Every thing that the malice and ingenuity of "the powers of darkness" could devise, and that the wickedness of men could put into execution, has been done to check its progress, and to destroy its very existence. It has been assailed by the storms of persecution, it has been exposed to the sunshine of prosperity. But the eyes of real believers have ever been opened to perceive that He that was with them, was greatly more powerful than they that were with their enemies; and feeling that the cause of the Gospel was the cause of God, they have never doubted about its final triumph.

When our blessed Lord first sent forth his Apostles to preach the Gospel, he explained to them with much precise-

ness the nature of the reception which they might expect to meet with from an evil world. Satisfied of the power and Messiahship of their Master, they were going forth expecting that their countrymen would universally attend to their message, and admit his claims. He checks these extravagant expectations, and warns them to look for opposition and neglect. He tells them that they are going forth defenceless, among cruel and unscrupulous enemies. They therefore needed uncommon correctness and prudence. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." But no conduct, however excellent and judicious, would secure them from the malice of those who hated the great truths which they proclaimed. "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in the synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles." And this was not the language of apprehension

merely. Our Lord spoke in the spirit of prophecy. We have ample testimony to the literal fulfilment of his prediction. The inspired history of the Acts of the Apostles, and in fact all the records of the first three centuries of Christianity, show the wisdom of the Saviour's warning. A Peter in the iron grasp of Herod, when naught but the interposition of Omnipotence could save him from the morrow's martyrdom, must have felt how justly he had been warned to "beware of men." The Apostle of the Gentiles, in those frequent trials which befel him in his successful labours, must have often felt the propriety of the warning, "Beware of men;" and when the haughty Roman, during nearly three hundred years of persecution, brandished the sword over the infant Church, the noble army of confessors and martyrs, while they trembled in the consciousness of man's weakness, and triumphed in the confidence of God's sufficiency, must have read in their own experience a terrible commentary on those words of wisdom, "Beware of men."

Persecution was the first and most in-

artificial policy of the deadly enemies of the Church. Brute force was the most natural and most obvious weapon in their warring against God. They raised, as it were, aloud their impious battle-cry, Down with her! down with her, even unto the ground! But they had other weapons in their armoury. Where force was vain, they have ever been found ready to try the force of seducing wiles. There is nothing violent in supposing a reference to this more subtle mode of attack in our Lord's warning, "Beware of men." Take heed that the Jew does not beat you off from a bold avowal of the truth, by his contempt for the claims of a crucified Messiah; that the Greek does not make you *ashamed* of the Gospel of Christ, by the ridicule with which he will treat a system so unphilosophical. And be ever on your guard against the stately magnificence and venerable associations of the worship of the temple, and the elegant rites and refined licentiousness of the Grecian idolatry.

But without stopping to inquire how

far the words of our Divine Master will bear an interpretation, which would find in them an allusion to all the dangers to which the Apostles were exposed from their fellow-men, I would invite you, my brethren, to regard those words as addressed to ourselves, and to hear the Saviour speaking to us the warning, "Beware of men." Let none suppose that I would wish to insinuate that it is well to entertain a cold distrust and unamiable jealousy of the influence of those around us. I would only wish, from the words of the text, to remind you of some of the dangers which are among the most threatening to our spiritual welfare; dangers too the more to be feared, as they are often, from their very nature, the least apprehended. May the Divine blessing be with us!

The dangers that assail the Church, are the very same dangers that oppose the progress, and threaten the ruin, of every individual Christian; and what is perilous to the community is no less perilous to its several members.

Worldly men have ever banded to-

gether against the Church, and have attempted by all the various means they could employ to prevent its welfare and its increase. The same enemies are the enemies of every individual believer. His faith is the object of their hatred, for his conduct is against them a standing reproach: he serves a different Master; and as he professes very different principles, so that judgment is to him a subject of hope, which to them is a subject of terror. The Christian therefore is not to marvel if the world hates him. It is what the world *must* do. He is at war with the world. His principles tend to carry havoc into the world's territories. He is the deadly foe of the rebellious spirit, who is the god of this world. The blessed truths which have released him from the power of sin and death, are calculated to release from their bondage all that serve the world. He opposes the world's maxims, he discourages the world's practices; there is nothing therefore at all wonderful in the dislike with which the world regards him; and it is a warning that he ought ever to

carry in his memory, that it becomes him to "beware of" worldly "men."

He may expect their hostility—it is allowed him to guard against it. He must expect persecution, if those who are his enemies for righteousness sake have it in their power to persecute. Their cry has always been, "Away with such a fellow from the earth!" But by the gracious providence of our heavenly Father, the Christian has now rarely cause to apprehend open violence. He must be prepared for misrepresentation, and ridicule, and slander. His enemies cannot appreciate his motives and conduct, they cannot even understand them. They will regard him as a designing hypocrite, or as a deluded fanatic. They deserve his pity, his sincere and unmixed pity. The grace of God which makes him to differ from them, will not allow him to feel towards them any sentiment of revenge. He must "not render railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing." The injustice and violence of others may tend to excite in him angry feelings. But *here* too he must "beware of men," and pray that

sacred Spirit, who helpeth our infirmities, to enable him to suppress the very first emotions of anger, that their hostility may not lead him to violate the charity that "beareth all things."

But the wicked are not less dangerous in their friendship, than in their hostility; and many a soul, that, as man would judge, would not by any violence have been forced from its fixed consistency, has yielded to the tempting influence of a *smiling* world. "Beware of" evil, unconverted "men." And if such men are to be feared more at one time than at another, it is when they make their attempts in the language of kindness, and cloak their real hostility in the garb of friendship. It is wonderful the lengths that some poor slaves of sensuality will go, in their attempts to corrupt those who have escaped the sins to which they are addicted. They feel a horrible delight in entangling the unwary and unstable in the toils of Satan. They will sometimes spare no pains in leading the victim into the fatal net; and [illegible]'h professions of love. But these are

langers to which the young only for the most part are exposed. The profligate rarely make their atempts on those who have once made a consistent profession of Christian principles. The deeds of darkness recoil from too near a compact with the light. And it is only under very peculiar circumstances that real Christians are likely to be assailed by temptation from persons of gross and open licentiousness.

But it is not only the profligate that are to be dreaded. Our Lord's meaning is much more general. "Beware of men." Beware lest any men, of whatever principles or character, lead you to that which the word of God condemns. Men who are most estimable in their conduct in their social relations, who are amiable in their manners, and regular in their general habits, but who are not under the influence of religion, are among the most dangerous associates to the Christian. Their general character leads him to forget the supreme importance of a change of heart. They are so respectable and so pleasing,

that he is tempted to let go the scriptural doctrine, that whatever is not of faith is sin. There is so much to admire in them, that it is not easy for him in their society to keep full in his memory a deep sense of the dreadful condition of those who are without God in the world. And thus he is tempted to unbelief. Nor is that all—he is in great hazard of falling into unlawful compliances. Those who have not the love of God in their hearts, however correct they may be in their intercourse with the world, will ever be found practising many things in which the Christian cannot lawfully join them. He knows that he is accountable for his thoughts, for his time, for every word he utters; and it is his desire to lay out every talent to the glory of the gracious Giver. Whereas the worldly man, however moral he may be, regards only the outside of the vessel; and fancies that if *that* is clean, he need be solicitous about nought beside. He has his pursuits; in these the Christian may not lawfully join him. He from time to time expresses sentiments,

which are quite at variance with the truth as it is in Jesus. It requires more than ordinary resolution in the Christian to discountenance what his principles engage him to disapprove in such persons. What he witnesses in silence may tend to weaken the horror with which he should ever regard sin. In such circumstances, therefore, he cannot too carefully "beware of men."

The warning does not apply only to the unconverted. There are many, of whom it would be unjust to think that they are not influenced by faith in the Saviour, who live below their privileges, and present an example that cannot be imitated without danger. There are too many who profess to feel the importance of religion, who are lukewarm, and inactive. They are content with a formal devotion, with a lifeless religion. They know the Gospel terms of acceptance, and are ready to profess that they have accepted these terms, but you can hardly distinguish them from the world. They are not careful to let their light shine before men; and few, very few,

are led by what they see in them to glorify their Father which is heaven. There is a danger in the example of their *stunted* religion; and well may we raise with respect to them the Lord's warning, "Beware of men."

But with respect to *what* men may we *not* raise that warning? In what human example is there not danger? The best of men, the excellent of the earth, have much in them of remaining infirmity—much that we may not imitate, that we may not approve. We cannot hold intercourse with them without hazard to our own spiritual condition. Do they approve our state? they may lead us to a false estimate of our own safety; do they desire us to look with suspicion on our professions? they may lead us to despair. Oh, we must never let go these sacred words, "Beware of men." We must never trust to beings so feeble, we must never expect too much from beings so imperfect. It would be tedious to attempt to enumerate every case in which it becomes us to apply the Saviour's warning; enough has been

said to shew the way in which we may apply it. I conclude with a remark which is naturally suggested by the subject. We may not rely on men, we may safely rely on God. There was never but One Man who presented an example in all things worthy of imitation. God was manifested in the flesh. He who bore our sins and carried our sorrows, in whom alone we can obtain redemption, has furnished us with a perfect pattern. While we study the perfections of his character, there is nothing for us to guard against; we cannot love him too much, we cannot imitate him too closely—we cannot trust him too implicitly, or rely on him too completely. May all of us, while we learn to "beware of men," be brought to repose more confidence in our now exalted Saviour!

SERMON XXVIII.

CHRISTIAN BOLDNESS.

PROVERBS xxviii. 1.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."

IN all ages and among all nations, courage has been regarded as a mark of honour and magnanimity, and cowardice has been considered a proof of pusillanimity and baseness. It has always been felt that nobility of mind displays itself in a contempt of danger, and a readiness to grapple with difficulties, while timidity is the infallible proof of a despicable indolence, or of conscious weakness. And this is actually the case. There *is* something base in cowardice. There *is* something

noble in courage. He wants the principle which keeps man up to his level in the chain of creation, who cannot meet danger boldly, but skulks timidly from the field of duty.

It is not for one who looks upon man and his doings with the light of the Gospel, and estimates the value of human principles and human actions by the rule afforded by revelation, to join in the common opinion of what is usually regarded as heroism, and contribute his praise of what is ordinarily so distinguished. What is sometimes described as valour, might with greater truth be characterized as madness: and that which many regard as admirable, ought rather to be looked upon with regret and pity. A name descriptive of a virtue ought never to be applied to what is equivocal, or culpable. It is treason to the quality to which it properly belongs. Yet such is the native dignity of courage, such the value it ever commands—that in its most suspicious forms, it possesses a charm which is almost irresistible. We can never witness a disregard of selfish

considerations, a willingness to encounter whatever might happen in pursuit of an object, a superiority to common weakness, a freedom from fear, without acknowledging, in spite of ourselves, a feeling of respect for the person in whom they are found, without paying some tribute to his character.

And on the other hand, to take the opposite class of qualities. It is not for Christian men to judge of timidity as the world judges—there is much that the world accounts cowardly which we regard as noble and magnanimous. But where we can see cowardice—where we perceive a want of stedfastness, a timorous apprehension of danger, there is something in the very constitution of our nature which makes us feel the meanness of it—which makes us regard it as vile and contemptible, and look upon the person of such a disposition as an inferior being.

Thus it is that cowardice and courage are accounted of by the common judgment of mankind: the one is regarded as a degrading, the other is looked upon as an ennobling quality. And if we examine

the real state of things, we shall find that this is no false judgment. The man who is under the influence of a feeling of cowardice, is in a state in which he cannot but be regarded as degraded. He passes judgment upon himself, in fact, by every fear,—he confesses to himself that he is too weak to do that which others will do with firmness. He betakes himself to low arts, to avoid the dangers of which he is apprehensive. Instead of boldly occupying the post in which Providence has placed him, he makes no scruple of deserting it, and throwing himself into a position wherein he fancies he may maintain himself with less hazard. Having no confidence in his powers of self-defence, he is continually afraid of being attacked. There is no place for stedfastness in him, because every accident may put him in confusion. There is no sense of safety, because he is always in apprehension of danger. There is, I say, something mean and inferior in this. The coward is the slave of his fear, and mankind are right in branding cowardice as vile and contemptible.

We may make the same assertion respecting the common estimate of courage. It is not an arbitrary judgment which ranks it as so ennobling and admirable. It is as it were the index of moral dignity. It is the mark of the value which a being puts upon itself. The brave man is tranquil, firm, concentrated. When danger comes, he is ready to meet it. When he is in peace, he is not agitated by apprehension of danger. He can exercise with freedom his powers of thought and speech and action. As he is prepared to battle with real dangers, he is not overpowered by those which are imaginary. He is the real master of what belongs to him, because he is master of himself. Peace rests upon his countenance, and honour is seated in his heart.

Now the text charges cowardice upon sin, and claims for holiness the honours of courage. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." I think we shall have no difficulty in establishing the correctness of this representation. May God Almighty grant

that the truth may come with power upon our souls!

There is nothing more wonderful in man than the moral faculty which we call conscience. By a wise arrangement of the Creator, men carry about in their bosoms a living register of their conduct, which they have only to consult with honesty and candour, to know their moral condition. Like the other faculties with which we are endowed, conscience may be injured and weakened. It may be so far impaired as to seem absolutely destroyed. But this is so only in extreme cases. In the great mass of men, conscience always continues more or less in action, keeping an account of the moral progress. When conscience is speaking in our favour, it affords the greatest increase of happiness. But when it is exercising its office against us, when it is making the record of our sins, it is a cruel tormentor, lashing our souls with a sense of guilt and an expectation of judgment.

Among the instruments of torture with which conscience afflicts the soul of the

sinner, is fear. Our first parents transgressed the command of their Creator, and then what follows? Let us hear the sacred historian.—"They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid." And this is the uniform process. Sin is immediately followed by fear, by the fear of detection, by the fear of exposure, by the fear of punishment. Under a sense of sin the bravest man becomes a coward.

Sin is followed by fear, especially by a fear of the Divine displeasure. This is a most important view of the subject, but it is not that first brought before us by the text. The sinner is there represented as a miserable being, entertaining a cowardly dread of his fellow-creatures. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." And it requires little observation, little ac-

quaintance with mankind, to enable us to perceive the correctness of the picture.

It is a very remarkable testimony to the excellence of God's law, that mankind are pretty well agreed in putting a high value upon outward morality. Though the world at large, even in Christian countries, is not influenced by Christian views and feelings, though it has no taste for the higher and more refined beauties of holiness, there are certain great outlines that it never ceases to recognize, as being in fact so deeply traced in our nature, that the moral constitution must be actually destroyed before they can be totally obliterated. However corrupt may be the state of society, a certain tribute is paid to truth, and justice, and honesty. Even among the ancient heathens we find, from the testimony of the Apostle, that the things which were true, and honest, and pure, were regarded as lovely and of good report. And it certainly is not different now. On the contrary, bad as the world is, the standard by which it judges of moral excellence is much higher. It knows much better what

is wrong, and much more generally regards sin with disapprobation.

The world, then, discountenances certain flagrant sins, and fixes the brand of its displeasure upon those who are guilty of them. But actions are judged of, even among men, by a higher tribunal than the world —namely, by those who are themselves distinguished for their regularity or holiness. Men who are tempted to do what is wrong, are checked not merely by apprehension of what the world might think, but of what particular individuals might think. There is that in virtue which secures it respect even with the abandoned. And, besides, there are very few who are not from inferior motives desirous of maintaining the good opinion of those who would look with displeasure upon what is evil.

It is plain therefore why the sinner is, as he most undoubtedly *is*, in a state of fear. Sin is a thing of darkness. It shuns the light. And when a man has sinned, his chief care is, that his sin should not be known to others. His friends would think

worse of him, and therefore he would not have them know it. His enemies would have an advantage over him, or a matter of reproach against him, and therefore he would not have it come to their knowledge. It cannot be undone. *That* is not in the nature of things possible. It is to be concealed therefore. It must not be known beyond that privacy in which it was committed. And yet how is this possible? There is something wonderful in the frequency with which, in spite of every precaution, it becomes known. A bird of the air will publish it. It walks abroad without visible reason, when all the chances were against its being known. The sinner knows this, though he may not remember that it is written in the volume of inspiration, Thy sin shall find thee out. He feels an instinctive terror that it will be so;—that some one will get to know it, who, he has peculiar reasons to wish, might remain in ignorance;—that it will some how or other come to tell against him. He sees how often this is the case, and he fears it may be the case with him.

He is ever apprehensive that the thing has come to light, that he is found out, that it is no longer confined to his own conscience, that his secret is in the possession of others who may turn it to his disadvantage. Great as may be the improbability of discovery, the event is possible; always probable enough to make him uneasy, to make him a coward, to make him "flee when no man pursueth," and be a stranger to peace.

We have supposed the sin to have been committed in private, when there was no one by to bear witness against the sinner. The case is not different when there have been accomplices. Exposure then becomes more probable, and consequently the grounds for alarm are greater and more distressing. The sinner then feels himself in the power of others, who are as bad or worse than himself. He knows very well *then* that he can never be safe. His accomplice may have an interest in betraying him, or may have a malicious pleasure in publishing his shame. It may be a babbler who will tell it out of mere garrulity, or a fool who will repeat it out of sport. It

can hardly fail to be discovered. He is well aware of this, and the delay of his exposure is only a protracting of his torment. He is ever in expectation of hearing that his sin is known. He "flees when no man pursueth." He is continually putting such a construction upon the most ordinary remarks as to regard them as proof of the discovering of his crimes, and finds in every thing materials of terror.

If his sin has been such as to expose him to punishment from man, the dread of punishment is added. Exposure may strip him of his honours, or his wealth; perhaps deprive him of his liberty. But we need scarcely pursue this case. Criminals of this sort are rarely among those who frequent the sanctuary. And interesting though it is to examine all the moral varieties, we have enough to do with more ordinary and familiar cases.

Let us now look at the words of the text in their full extent. Even when the sinner has no reason to fear man at all, he is not free from feelings of terror. There are innumerable sins of which man takes

no cognizance. There are some which are generally regarded as deserving no kind of censure, as rather implying what is upon the whole rather laudable than otherwise. There are some persons who without being absolutely abandoned, freely discourse of their vices, and there are but too many who "glory in their shame." The remarks which have been made hitherto, do not altogether apply to such persons; though they often do to an extent which they themselves perhaps would scarcely be willing to admit. Yet these persons are not without the range of the text. It is not because they are not in fear from man, that their hearts know no terror; no, "the wicked flee, when no man pursueth." Even when the world smiles on them, when they hear no condemnation from their fellow-creatures, there is a something that will not let them rest: "there is no peace to the wicked." Though they boast perhaps of their superiority to common prejudices, and profess to think not of an hereafter, conscience will not allow them peace. "They flee, when no man pursueth." They

are restless, unsettled, miserable. They may seek relief in the sins which have already wounded their souls. They may go from one wickedness to another. When they flee, it may be to dissipation or crime. They do but increase their misery. They do but treasure up for themselves "wrath against the day of wrath, and righteous indignation of God."

But it is time for us to change the picture, and turn our attention to the remaining words of the text, which tell us that "the righteous are bold as a lion." The figure is a striking one. In the popular language of various nations, of ancient and modern times, the lion is uniformly spoken of as the boldest and most noble of the beasts of prey. A consciousness of strength, his acknowledged superiority to the other tenants of the forest, is supposed to stamp his character with a certain magnanimity, and to make him the monarch of the desert. His courage has passed into a proverb. And the highest degree of intrepidity is implied by the comparison, "the righteous are bold as a lion."

As fear is one of the most evident consequences of the fall, one of the plainest proofs of our present degraded condition, it is natural to suppose that the less influence sin possesses over us, the more we are brought to the condition in which man was created, the less we shall be under the influence of fear, the greater will be our self-possession and courage. And this is the case: we must not forget to make the distinction between physical and moral timidity. We must bear in memory that there is a timidity which is nothing more or less than a bodily infirmity, as much the consequence of physical structure as any other disease. And bearing this in mind, we may assert for this part of the text the claim of perfect accuracy, and triumphantly point to experience as proving that "the righteous are bold as a lion."

Where there is uprightness of conduct, there is no place for fear. He who has done nothing to be ashamed of, cannot dread detection or exposure. He who acts from principle, who does what he does in the fear of God, will not be afraid of the

consequences of his actions, because he is well assured that all those consequences are in the hands of the great Disposer. The Christian acts from a sense of duty; and, in obedience to the will of God, he is "bold as a lion." As it has been finely said, "He fears the Lord, and has no other fear." It is not that he has not enemies; it is not that his enemies are not formidable. He "wrestles not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The attacks of the world, the open opposition he meets with in the path of duty, are directed by the principle of evil. But he fights bravely. It is not that he is not aware of his danger; it is not that he feels a false security, that he is lulled into apathy, or is sunk into carelessness. He feels more than others can feel, for he knows his position. He is aware of his danger. He is sensible of the dreadful consequences of failure. But he has God to help him. His providence will defend him; his grace will sustain him.

He "fears not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

In the discharge of duty "the righteous are bold as a lion." Theirs is the real, the only real courage. It is not presumption, for they are trusting on Him who is infinite. It is not desperation, for they can rely on innumerable promises, made by God himself. They present a bold front to their enemies; they feel their superiority to them. But before Him with whom they have to do, their Father in heaven, there is nought of self-confidence; they are conscious of their lost and unworthy condition. They confess that they have destroyed themselves; that it is of his mercy that they are not consumed; that they "are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for their own works, or deservings." Their righteousness is the righteousness of God. They go not about to establish their own righteousness, they regard it but as filthy

rags. Their language is, "Lord, have mercy." They are bold in duty. It is that they fear to sin. But they come before God with humility, pleading his mercy and their own infirmity and guilt, looking for acceptance to the atoning blood of the Saviour. It is of grace they are what they are. The Divine compassion has plucked them as brands from the burning. It is not that they have loved God, but that *He* has loved them. They are desirous of giving up all they have and all they are to his service, and of glorifying Him before men.

But they have a good hope through grace. "They are confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." A sense of sin will weigh them down; a consciousness of infirmity will fill them with doubt and trembling; but this is their weakness and their shame. Their privilege is to be "bold as a lion." Their Saviour has achieved the victory. He has conquered Satan and the grave. It is his work they have to trust

to, and his grace. Let them trust in Him, and they cannot fail. They may bid farewell to doubt and insecurity. Their foundation is a rock; their hope is sure and ...t. Their Master can enable them to ...come sin, and attain to heaven.

...en, may He give us this con..., and to that end may He give us ...grace. Convinced, as we must be, that ...othing but terror in a state of ... sin, may we find in our own ...nce, ...t "the righteous are bold as

THE END.

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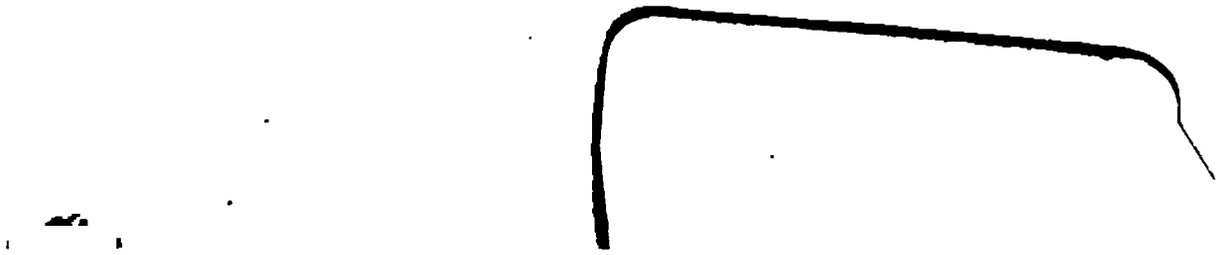
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